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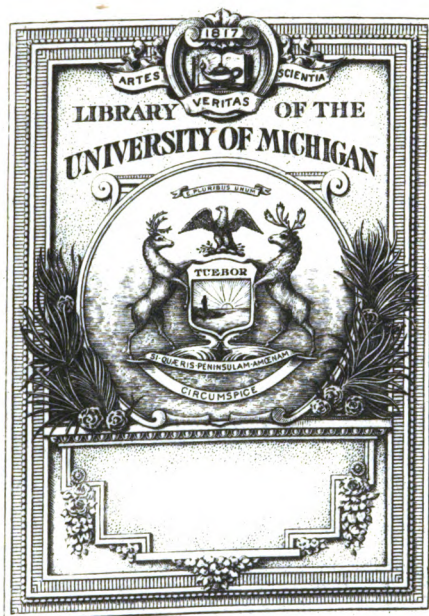
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# *Crescendo*

by

HENRY BELLAMANN



THE GIFT OF  
Prof. Howard M. Jones

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*Crescendo*



# *Crescendo*

*by*

HENRY BELLAMANN

*Author of "Petenera's Daughter"*



*New York*

HARCOURT, BRACE & COMPANY



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*To*

**KATHERINE BELLAMANN**



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*. . . tides draw ever and ever to these in-  
constant coasts, striving to mold some shape  
unknown to us, striving to sound some music  
strange to us. . . .*



# *Crescendo*

## *Part I*

### I

It was near the theater hour and most of the taxicabs on Manhattan were streaming toward the congested Forties. Robert Ives looked at his watch as the chauffeur edged into the maelstrom of Broadway. In fifteen minutes the curtains would rise on three-score stages while tens of thousands of ticket holders blocked each other's progress outside. Traffic police blew whistles, and signal lights winked alternate ruby and emerald eyes, with no apparent effect. Pedestrians overflowing sidewalks and lanes of crossing surrounded the cabs and slipped between them, escaping the inching wheels by miraculous margins.

Ives consulted his watch again. He was only a block from his destination, but Heaven alone knew what circuitous routes to it might be prescribed by Broadway's incomprehensible traffic regulations. He leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

"I think I'll walk on. I've no time to lose."

## II

The lobby of the theater was a struggling mass of people. Some of them were fortunate ticket holders trying to enter; the others were unsuccessful late-comers trying to get out. On the sidewalk was a mob watching the arrivals.

It was a first night, and an exceptional one—the début of a Spanish diseuse whose American appearance had been press-agented with the flamboyance of a Barnum, plus the somewhat more subtle but sure-fire methods of modern publicity.

Ives reached his box before the other members of the party. The house was almost filled with what the morning papers would call a brilliant audience. He glanced about with some curiosity. The art of this diseuse was familiar to him. He had heard her many times in cabarets and music halls abroad where she had been popular for the wit and charm of her specialized talent. He was somewhat puzzled by the aura of greatness that had been created for her. He was interested to see if the engaging, though somewhat fragile and unimportant character of her performance could support the weight of this amazing *réclame*.

The ornate program had a festival aspect. There was a long list of patrons; but few of the names familiar

to Ives, whose long residence in Europe had left him out of touch with the rapidly shifting "Who's who" of New York. There was a plentiful sprinkling of titles among them: a duchess, two or three princes and princesses, and several lesser ones. These names he readily attached to their owners as they appeared in their boxes: he had met their likenesses again and again in idle perusal of cigarette and cosmetic advertisements.

There was a little stir in the audience as Franz Behrbach, the banker, came in. Ives adjusted his glasses and considered him closely. He had heard a great deal of Behrbach before coming to America, and had come to think of the man as something of a world citizen and a distinguished patron of music and the arts. He was easily recognizable from his pictures: slight, dapper, excessively groomed, and consciously self-possessed. He was standing now, bowing this way and that,—greetings that seemed a bit eagerly snapped up by certain of the recipients. There was something disappointing about him; perhaps it was his too meticulous dress, as though he did not dare permit a flaw in his appearance. Other arrivals claimed the eyes and attention of the audience, and Behrbach sat down.

An odd group filed into the opposite stage box. Ives smiled a little as he recognized Mrs. Sarah van Ruyn—the fortified general of the inner fastness of



old Dutch New York. An incredibly ugly old woman, but what a personage! She was dressed tonight in pale pink with an ostrich feather boa about her shoulders. The arrangement of her hair was uncompromising. Her whole appearance and manner seemed to say that she had met every one she cared to know, and that she knew every one she cared to meet. Nothing could bring a gleam of appreciation, or a glow of excitement to the slate blue eyes. There was in her no look of advance or retreat; no giving as there was no taking. Her habitual air of censoriousness was never ameliorated to more than probationary tolerance. She was enclosed and complete; undoubtedly stupid, but a personage.

Ives smiled again. Bravo, Sarah, he thought, you're definite anyway; you're *something*, even if no one could possibly like it.

He turned his attention for a moment to the determinedly old-fashioned group surrounding her. They might have been done by Sargent in the nineties; not quite so fine of line, though—a bit more like a group of Gibson gone decrepit.

The audience was brightly noisy. The presence of that list of patrons lent assurance to the unassured, further supported by the certainty that the record price of the seats spelled exclusiveness.

. . . Strange, the observer's musings went on, that a people uniquely great in so many ways should lean so heavily on the artificial distinctions of the old countries they affected to despise.

His train of thought was broken by the arrival of his hostess and her party.

Mrs. Mabry Hamerick marshaled them into place with authoritative gestures. She had two adjoining boxes and Ives noted with amusement that she unhesitatingly reserved for her immediate companions the younger and better looking members of the group. All of them were strangers to him, and Mrs. Hamerick's casually muttered introductions were unenlightening. She always performed the ceremony of introduction as though she had no real intention of establishing acquaintance.

"Why didn't you come to dinner, Robert, or didn't I ask you?" She continued without waiting for an answer. None was made since he knew a reply was not expected. Mabry, as every one called her, was deaf, and her conversation was always a monologue interspersed with purely rhetorical questions.

"The Bradys and Mrs. Cantrey came in. I wasn't expecting them. I never remember who has been asked—that's why I always have some small tables set up. Remember you're coming tonight. There'll be some

music. Some of the singers from the opera are coming in late. Baumgarten is coming—have you heard him?—I shan't ask him to sing, but he will. They always do if you don't ask them. He's pretty good as German singers go. Most of them that have come over lately are terrible. I don't go to the opera much. My ear troubles me some; I have to carry this machine with me all the time now. I'd rather have music at home. Everybody comes to sing and play for me. It isn't so bad being deaf—there are lots of tiresome things I don't have to listen to any more. I hate it on account of plays, though. I went to see *The Captive* last Friday, no—it was Thursday—or Wednesday . . . Was it now?—maybe it was Friday—well, no matter. I couldn't hear a third of it. But I had read it before. Tickles me to see New York all stirred up about it. Town's full of Lesbians running loose—what of it?—doesn't disturb me s'long as they leave me alone—and I suppose they will. I'm getting old, Robert—I am old . . . old woman. Hate it, too. It's going to be funny when all of these left-overs can be rejuvenated enough to take notice again. Not that I'd say most of my acquaintances seem to need it. How do they do it?

“I heard a lot about Steinach in Vienna last summer. Avery Bauer—you remember Avery Bauer?—used to paint a little—he's given it up now—inherited

some money—Avery said to me, ‘Mabry, you’re one person I’d like to see take the Steinach treatment. I don’t know any one who would enjoy it more,’ but I said no, not for me. I’ve had enough.

“Robert, who is that in the pink outfit? My God, if it isn’t Sarah van Ruyn! Do you suppose she dresses that way to reprove all the old flappers, or hasn’t she any more imagination? I haven’t seen an ostrich feather boa since the Cleveland administration. Whole party looks like something out of the family album.”

Mrs. Hamerick aimed her morocco-covered receiving apparatus at the opposite box as though she were kodaking the subject of her comment.

“Isn’t that Stoney Morton with Mabel Newbold? Third time this week I’ve seen them together. He isn’t particular, though, s’long as it’s somebody else’s wife.

“How about this Spanish woman we’re going to hear? She’s good? You’ve heard her, of course—or seen her?—whichever is more important. I haven’t. I don’t suppose she’s as good as she’s advertised. Couldn’t be—no one could be . . . Tch! Tch! I can’t get over Sarah van Ruyn. She’s no older than I am. Tell me, Robert, do you think I’m all wrong keeping up with the times at my age? All the same I don’t believe you’d guess what that actually is—lean over here—*sixty-nine*—last birthday! That’s a long time: I’ve seen a lot.” She

sighed a little and swept the audience with her glasses.

He observed her closely. Mabry Hamerick was what in another stratum of society would be called a "character." She was of German and English extraction and her family had made a fortune in some mercantile business. There was much of her shrewd, hard-headed, common-sense ancestors about her. She had a look of independence. She thought things out for herself. She was a self-active person, and this, coupled with her wealth and freedom, had given her an air of concrete consequence. She had married a distinguished lawyer, now dead, and had always enjoyed a wide acquaintance that was not circumscribed by any class. Through her innate love of music she had sought the company of musicians.

There was just enough of artistic and intellectual snobbery about her to make her a bit vain of these friendships with well-known people. She enjoyed having her home filled with celebrities, but she was also sufficiently democratic and sufficiently indifferent to include any one who amused her. The people who thronged to her parties were motley, but entertaining.

Robert Ives' scrutiny was that of the painter which sought in appearances the significances underneath. Mabry was modern to the minute. Her short hair had the modish swirl, but its gray was untouched. Her face was the best result of the beauty specialist's art, but its

ivory tint was her own, and the faint flush on her strongly modeled cheek bones was the honest reward of a strong-handed masseuse. Her pearls were irreproachable, and her severe black velvet gown was the ultimate of an expert Paris cutter. But neither the art of the Parisian clothes, nor that of two skillful maids could conceal the blunt, staunch-charactered woman that was Mabry Hamerick. There was no lack of indicated imagination in her rather steep brow, no lack of humor in her large mouth, while the sparkle of her black eyes told that she found no lack of amusement in the world about her.

He turned his attention for a moment to the other members of the party. They were mostly young, with the carefully maintained look of amused boredom that Ives found such a surprising and unbecoming affectation in Americans, who, it seemed to him, were of all people the ones who should have the most zestful approach to life.

On the other side of Mabry sat a young man in clerical dress. He was good-looking in a soft sort of way. Ives noted the thin ribbon of some foreign order twisted in the button hole of the severe coat, and smiled again. Mabry had an eye for picturesque variety.

"Robert, how is your wife? When is she coming?"

"Astrid is still in Oslo—"

"Where?—Oslo? Oh, yes. I can't get used to that, can you? I used to like to hear her say Christiania—she made it sound like a phrase of Meyerbeer's! When did you say she is coming?"

"Not until May, I think. They are having some sort of family reunion."

"I wish she'd come earlier—like to see her. I'll probably be gone somewhere by that time. Don't know where I'm going this year. I've been everywhere—always see the same people. Paris, Baden-Baden, Biarritz—except Vienna; I have a lot of nice Austrian friends. Think maybe I'll try South America. Ever been there? Can't find any one to go with me, though. Astrid keeps up her playing, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, yes. Practices every day. I think her playing grows better all the time. She's very much absorbed in it."

"She's the finest amateur pianist I know except maybe Daisy Whitworth—you know, Lady Croxton in London—never played anywhere, of course, but a great pianist. Astrid's just as good. Like to hear her again. Dr. Merriweather here is musical, too. Has fine taste. D'ye know him at all? Rector of—" Mabry's attention was caught for a moment by some one in the audience and she muttered something that sounded like

"Church of the Ascent and Descent of the Holy Cross," but he decided he couldn't have heard aright.

". . . very high church, you know, very—confession and all. Some of 'em call him Father, but I don't like that much. Affectation, I think, maybe—I may be wrong. Don't take much stock in religion any more, myself. All right when you're very young—or very old!" She chuckled a bit sardonically.

"I'm expecting Mrs. Hirsch—she'll be late—" Mabry's smile was malicious—"late enough for an effective entrance! How I sound like an old cat! Lucy's all right, though. Know her? Immensely rich—husband's an importer. Newcomer—by the Palm Beach route. Gives heavily to musical enterprises and the like. She'll make the grade. By next winter Sarah van Ruyn will invite her to dinner."

"What then?" he asked.

Mabry laughed appreciatively. "I often wonder—I often wonder."

The lights were already lowered when Mrs. Hirsch entered. Ives caught an impression in the half light of a tall and extraordinarily beautiful woman. She wore a flowing, dark rose velvet gown of Florentine fashion, and her hair was lifted from her ears and arranged in Continental mode. Magnificent old Italian



jewelry completed a carefully studied and highly individual effect.

The audience was in an uproar. The piquant little disease sank and rose in a series of deep courtesies. An almost breathless silence succeeded as the husky voice began. . . .

### III

Robert Ives was, just now, a much-talked-of painter. An American by birth, he had lived for nearly twenty years the nomadic life of an artist on the Continent, during which time he had lost all touch with America. He had been in New York for nearly a year, and was finding it exceedingly interesting and pleasant. An exhibition at a well-known Fifty-seventh Street gallery established the reputation that had preceded him, and he found himself in the midst of a rather heterogeneous acquaintance that interested him extremely.

New York's ready acceptance of him—the almost boisterous acceptance of the youthful city with its publicity and exploitation—had puzzled and amazed him, but the naïveté of the artist was pleased by pictures and notices in illustrated Sunday supplements and magazines ranging from the smart to the smarty. He did not know the superficial nature of this fickle generosity, so that he had, for the moment, an unalloyed pleasure in it.

He was not, however, in doubtful case concerning his work. He was too fine and too experienced an artist for that. He knew the exact value of it. It was Robert Ives the man, with the simple but not unpleasant egotism of an artist, who was engaged by personal aspects of the tributes. He was very happy, and quite looked it as he leaned on the edge of the box to follow the miniature comedies and tragedies of the Spaniard's representations. He was foreign-looking with the emphasized manners of France—even his English was slightly edged with a Gallic accent—nevertheless one did not feel in him the inaccessibility of the foreigner. He had patently the frankness and approachableness of the American. Women liked him, first perhaps because of his good looks, and then for the serious attention he always gave to their conversation. Habituated to a society in which women were received as intellectual equals, he had nothing of that patronizingly amused attitude of the American man toward feminine opinion.

Men did not, as a rule, like him so well. They regarded him with that hesitancy peculiar to business men in the presence of musicians, painters and writers. It appeared to Ives that only intelligent Jews took him quite seriously, and accepted him frankly into the freemasonry of masculine adults. He was not greatly

disturbed by this, inasmuch as he preferred the society of women.

Tonight he was quite given up to the spell of the city and its restless people. New York appeared to him more as the fabulous creation of some fantastic and extravagant modernistic fancy, than as something entirely real. There was an air of impermanency about it, especially at night, whose impact on his senses was nevertheless almost physical. It stimulated him violently, and aroused him at times to a very frenzy of creative energy.

He sought in his vocabulary for a word and came upon it finally with something like a shock of surprise. . . . It was, yes, it was aphrodisiac! He reviewed this idea—somewhat novel to his fastidiousness. The vivacious disease and the audience blurred pleasantly on his attention and he lost himself more and more in the contemplation of thoughts and half-thoughts shifting constantly in pictorial form under the watchful marshaling of some artistic faculty which seemed never, even in such moments of idle dreaming, to be entirely off guard.

#### IV

. . . The audience was on its feet applauding. The Señorita drooped like a great silken poppy in deep

courtesies, her mantillaed head almost touching the floor. She kissed her hands to the boxes, to the galleries, she threw the last of her bunches of violets to gentlemen in the front rows. She had been a sensational success.

"Well," said Mabry as she snapped her glasses into their case, "how did you like her? I thought she was fetching—couldn't hear much of it though. Like her, Dr. Merriweather?"

The rector made a slightly supercilious grimace which was habitual with him whenever he was a bit uncertain.

"You're coming home with me, all of you," Mrs. Hamerick continued, her eyes roving for possible additions to the party. "Jeffrey, you go ahead and hold some cabs for us. If you see Clara Markham, tell her to come on to my place and bring those people she has with her—tell her to bring any one she wishes."

Mabry's invitations, as she made her way through the lobby, were indeed like the gentle rain—they fell on the deserving and the undeserving alike. Her sense of hospitality invariably overrode her discrimination with the result that her parties, projected on a basis of intimacy and selection, always materialized as heterogeneous routs.

When Ives arrived at the apartment it was already

crowded with people, few of whom had ever seen each other before. Mabry moved about briskly reciting names in the belief that she was making introductions. As she addressed no one in particular, and forgot to indicate in any way the owners of the names, these seeds of social promotion fell on barren ground, or were lost in the interstices of stentorian conversations.

Servants edged through the rooms with trays of cocktails.

"You'll find Scotch in the serving pantry, if any of you want it. It's good, too; I know where it comes from. Never drink myself; my doctor won't let me."

"I don't think I will either," said Dr. Merriweather, lowering his voice unnecessarily. "This much liquor couldn't be good!" Nevertheless he moved in the direction Mabry had indicated.

More people arrived, the pitch of conversation rose, and the air became blue with cigarette smoke.

V

Ives wandered about the apartment which consisted of a huge room, in which most of the company were gathered, and a maze of smaller rooms. Already a number of independent parties were forming—noisy groups, affectionately intimate. They succeeded in keeping these small rooms to themselves by the simple device

of greeting intruders with a sudden, meaning silence. The hasty retreat of such discomfited invaders was invariably followed by shrieks of laughter.

Mabry disappeared into her room, and reappeared shortly, wearing bedroom slippers decorated with huge ostrich feather pompons.

"I have to do it," she explained. "Only place I feel my age. I can stay up all night with the youngest, but I can't keep shoes on."

The clamor in the big room, which she called the music room, was terrific. She heard it only as the tempered sound of festivity and looked about her with a kindly and pleased expression. Every one was having a good time.

It was an odd setting for such a gathering. Carte blanche had been given to the most expensive decorator in New York and the result was an Italian room of somewhat ecclesiastical aspect. There were ancient refectory tables, faded tapestries, soft brocades, carved cabinets, priceless rugs and a few paintings—Italian primitives of saints and Madonnas who gazed tranquilly from their dim gold backgrounds. Huge candles sputtered fatly in their shapeless heaps of drippings.

To the serene and carefully spaced furnishings of this sumptuous room, Mabry had added sundry personal belongings: photographs in hideous silver frames,

brass book ends holding variegated assortments of late fiction, cloisonné cigarette boxes, gay ash trays supported by coy dancing girls, and one or two sophisticated French dolls.

The effect was somewhat that of an emergency residence in a museum, but nevertheless characteristic of Mabry's own particular blend of exotic cultivation and middle-class comfort.

"There's Nicky!" Mrs. Hamerick hurried to the door and embraced the arrival, a boy of fourteen or fifteen. "Come here, Robert, this is Nicky Mirachowsky. He's going to play tonight—wonderful pianist—he's to be a second Josef Hofmann. Get yourself some sandwiches, Nicky." She pushed him affectionately toward one of the loaded tables.

"He's wonderful, Robert. I want your wife to hear him when she comes back. Somebody found him on the East Side—father's a tailor, or something—everybody says he's the real thing. Wait till you hear him."

The boy stood quite still in the middle of the room, not exactly embarrassed, because he was already used to this sort of exploitation, but he was nevertheless ill at ease. The exaggeratedly childish clothes did not disguise an incongruous look of premature adolescence. He was neither child nor youth, but an air of touch-

ing patience gave him something of the peculiar appeal of both.

"Discomfortable-looking kid, isn't he?"

"Oh, hello, Brookes. Speaking of the prodigy? Yes, isn't he? That's a good word for him. Heard him play?"

"Once or twice. Good s'far as I can tell. But they're ruining him. Look at his father over there by the door. Fairly dripping with excited pride. Wants every one to know that he did it. Funny thing about parents of that kind, salving inferiority complexes with gifted children—want you to think they had all the potentialities of art, or something fine in them. That slimy object over there thinks he made a pianist by the simple act of procreation. Hell of an accident to overtake a kid."

"You mean genius or the gloating parent?"

"Both, I guess; but genius is a rotten deal for any one. Must be a good deal like the Spartan fox buttoned under your vest."

Ives laughed. Brookes Parker had a pungent gift of expression.

"I suppose you're half right at that."

"You ought to know, old man. Don't be modest."

"I'm not a genius. Proof is, according to you, I've been pretty comfortable. Not a claw scratch on my bosom."



"You're not through yet. There's something ominous in the way the swat holds off."

"I'd be a little more hopeful if I believed in your prophetic endowments. That accolade of greatness, along with some other fundamentals, has been withheld. I'll jog along, be elected to some more academies, and die quite comfortably. The obituaries will remark that 'he won the unqualified respect of his confrères'—a damnation of mediocrity I'd like to escape, even at the expense of a few pangs."

"Talk on, little one. I've seen your pictures, and I've known you, off and on, for fifteen years. You've got a, well—a kind of sense of destiny about you."

Ives laughed outright this time. "Since when has the old money bags turned clairvoyant? I'll wager you write poetry in secret! Come on, now, do you?"

"This isn't poetry. I'm an aging grubber in a money bank—good place, by the way, to size up souls; see 'em with their clothes off—but my guess is that life hasn't begun on you yet."

"How many of Mabry's highballs have you had?"

"Not enough. Come along, let's have one. How's Astrid? Is she coming over pretty soon?"

"In May, I guess. She has a short tour of the Scandinavian countries and a couple of concerts at Amsterdam."

"It'll be good to see her. I haven't heard her play since—let me see, Paris, wasn't it?"

Further conversation became difficult in the narrow passage leading to the pantry where the uproarious onslaught kept two capped and aproned maids busy mixing and serving drinks.

"Great invention—prohibition. It has kindled the spark of enthusiasm in many a dull breast. Ardor of the chase plus the forbidden sweet, you know. Don't think we could do without it now."

Brookes Parker was a member of an important banking house, and had been Ives' closest friend for a number of years. They had met only in Europe on Parker's vacation trips but a warm friendship had grown up between the odd pair. Ives, sensitive and introspective, was unable to make the simplest overtures of acquaintance. Such friendships as he had came to him from the few who sensed his eager wish for companionship and sympathy. Parker, no less sensitive beneath his acquired professional exterior, was genuinely devoted to the painter. His instinctive appreciation of Ives the artist had given him the key to Ives the man. They met after long separations on grounds of understanding as intimate as though they had been in daily association.

The contrast between them was amusing. Parker

had the indifferent, almost slouching manner born of the national terror that elegance or good manners might be mistaken for "airs." His conversation was bluntly epigrammatic, deliberately inconsiderate at times, but racy with a practical philosophy couched in the phraseology of "the plain people" whom he secretly despised. He derived an inordinate satisfaction from the touch of Old World courtliness in his friend—a sort of esthetic pleasure which he strove with all his might to conceal.

Ives was open in his admiration for Parker and the nearest approach to enthusiasm and informality in his fastidious demeanor was such as one saw now as the two clinked glasses and revealed to each other their most intimate selves in terms of casual banter.

## VI

Mabry clapped her hands for silence. Nicky Mirachowsky was at the piano. Something of his look of patient bewilderment fell from him when he played. Ives listened critically for a few moments and then lost interest. The boy had talent, but his playing was nothing more than an imitation of a distinguished master.

Mabry was listening with the odd look of reverence that she assumed whenever any one played or sang.

She liked the vague and pleasant sound which was all of the music that reached her, and she nodded her head, slightly out of time, to it as she shrewdly took stock of her guests. She found a complex pleasure in bringing these diverse groups together. They reflected various phases of herself. Those of the smarter sets came because they genuinely liked Mabry. Those less smart came to rub elbows with those whose pictures appeared in Sunday supplements, and the musicians came because they found an audience. That they did not mix concerned the hostess not at all. She liked people—all kinds of people—and many of them.

Baumgarten sang as Mabry had predicted. Mellowed with plentiful cocktails, his bourgeois face glowed with delight in the sound of his own voice. He kept a glass in his hand which he waved gently as he sang. He was becoming a bit unsteady at the knees, and found the piano a welcome support, but he was too well routined an artist to sing badly. The perfection of his diction and the spacious majesty of his phrasing were automatic. Alcohol merely warmed the process, and honest tears of musical appreciation glistened in his small, rather close-set eyes.

*"Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt  
Weiss was ich leide—"*

"Rather amazing, isn't it?" said Ives.

"Oh, I don't know. He's just an instrument. The discriminating skill of a dozen good teachers is playing on him—that's the explanation. Most of these singers have no brains. They're plastic. Baumgarten would make a first rate hypnotic subject."

"I don't see Marcia Deering," Parker continued. "She usually drops in on these evenings for a few minutes. You know her, of course?"

"I know who she is but I've not met her."

"Good Lord, you don't mean it! I thought every one knew Marcia Deering. Most brilliant woman in New York. Thoroughbred, clever, knows everybody and everything about everybody. Has about as good a brain as you'll meet—perfectly clear, and perfectly hard."

"Sounds perfectly terrifying."

"Not at all. She simply isn't sentimental. Her intelligence functions without emotional interference. Women are less sentimental, anyway, than men."

"Get out, Brookes. I haven't the energy to debate with you—"

A fresh outbreak of applause, laughter and cheers came from the opposite end of the room.

"Come on, Dora: what do you care?"

"Oh, but—"

"Sing 'em first, and apologize afterward."

"What do they want her to do?" Mabry asked.

"Gay little French songs—" The man exaggerated the motion of his lips so that Mabry could understand.

"She's afraid—"

"Tell her to go ahead. Dora! What's the matter? Sing—"

Ives turned a slightly wondering glance toward the group. "Who is she?"

"That shrinking little thing is Dora O'Day, late of the Paris Opera where she sang small parts. You know the taste of tired old French gentlemen sometimes declines a little. Dora comes from Brooklyn and has won her way by her own efforts! Sweet, isn't she?"

Miss O'Day had taken her place by the piano. She looked a good deal like a large, pink Poland China thoroughbred. Her quick eyes moved in pockets of fat, and her nose, so snubbed that it appeared to be nothing more than nostrils, was equally in danger of disappearance.

Her costume of net and crystal would have been more appropriate for the revue stage.

She rapped on the piano for attention. "I'm going to sing some little French songs. If any of you don't understand French, you can ask some one to translate for you."

There was another burst of applause and the groups from the bedrooms, glasses in hand, came to the door to listen.

The pianist, a slim boy with the air of a gigolo, snapped out crisp introductory measures.

The songs were of the frankest, but even the discreet sparkle of the music and the saving spirit of the French language went down before the determination of Dora O'Day's interpretation. A Montmartre cocotte would have made of the songs nothing more than bubbles of suggestion, so fleeting and swift that their naughtiness would have flicked out on a breath of laughter; but Dora fortified the implications with heavy borrowings from the manner of a Harlem cabaret singer and the motions of the Black Bottom.

The applause was deafening, and the encores became a program. Mabry watched rather than listened with an indulgent, almost benevolent smile. She was not hearing a word. Most of the audience did not understand, even with the highly illustrative pantomime of eyes, hands, and hips with which the performer illuminated the text.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Ives, "has Mabry any idea of what's going on?"

"None whatever. Besides, the party is changing. A lot of people have gone home and new ones are com-

ing. Mabry's parties progress in the manner of a geological demonstration. We're several strata down, with more to come if you stick around until morning."

Dora O'Day was succeeded by a dancer who wore the minimum allowance of chiffon. She was a Swedish girl of heroic build, and her appearance did not lend itself perfectly to the elfin subjects of her interpretation.

Brookes Parker grunted. His cynicism increased with his consumption of highballs.

"I always wonder why an Amazon like that must do a butterfly chase. They embarrass me, anyway, these dancers in a drawing room. They're all right with footlights separating them from the audience. This way I never know what part of 'em to look at."

"Look where you want to, Brookes—that's understood, I guess."

Baumgarten passed, now in a state of extreme appreciation.

"*Wunderschön! Wunderschön! Reizend!* I tell you," he leaned confidentially toward Ives, "I like to see a slow movie of her." He waved his glass toward the dancer and surveyed her with a look of benevolent sensuality. "*Wunderschön! Wunderschön!*"

The pace of the entertainment accelerated. There were some almost professional performances of the



Black Bottom with piquant variations by a danseuse of imagination. A Hungarian basso sang some songs in his native tongue which fortunately no one understood. There was little now to distinguish the party from one of the freer night clubs. The appreciation of many of the guests was heightened by the knowledge that no check awaited settlement in the morning.

"There *is* Marcia Deering, after all. She isn't usually present at this phase of a party. I'll introduce you presently."

Ives scrutinized the arrival with a lively curiosity. There was something about her that engaged the imagination at once. Brookes was right. She did not readily classify.

The sudden stimulus of a personality was sufficient to set the delicate machinery of Ives' artist faculties in motion. The future importance of a new acquaintance always made itself manifest in the violent pictorial shuttling that set up in his brain. He saw Marcia Deering with the extreme clearness of trained vision, but at the same time his attention was on something that was happening inside of his head. There the unique qualities of her personality were registering themselves in a swift flutter of cinema-like projections of no apparent sequence, but of distinct significance to him. He was almost ashamed of the serious consideration

he gave to these uncontrollable reactions. It sounded a little crazy whenever he tried to put it into words. Even Brookes Parker knew nothing of his friend's half mediumistic habit of thought.

While he was bowing low over her hand he caught a breath-taking glimpse of heraldic banners cresting the further rise of a hill. The gallantry of the pageant was exactly the gallantry of Marcia Deering's bearing. There was a gay intention in her air, a sense of high emprise in her glance.

Brookes put it well: "I always feel like joining the procession when I see you, Marcia. I don't know why you started, or where you're going; but I'm going with you."

She laughed a bright, impersonal laugh, that, for all of its frankness and freedom, rather increased the enigma of her personality. Ives looked at Brookes with that fresh delight he always found in his friend's unexpected penetration. Marcia Deering was so clearly in full career of some profound adventure of the soul. One felt conscious determination in her and a serene purpose, but equally one was sure of her peculiar solitariness: she enlisted no one as she followed no one.

What was she doing here? Ives felt intuitively that her friends, her acquaintances and her activities were accepted as parts and rules of a game which she played

as she found it—a game whose conditions had been made in advance and which she would not have dreamed of changing. She was sharply and intensely aware of what went on around her at all times. She sensed what lay beneath, she appraised, but seemingly she did not judge. Now as she viewed the room there was no faintest hint of disapproval in her expression. Criticism and disapproval of others connote some admission of them into one's own world. Marcia Deering admitted no one; therefore she allowed herself no right of criticism or disapproval.

He felt a chill of disappointment at his discovery of her curious isolation. It was as though he had looked for a moment into a parterred garden only to find ingress barred by a wall of glass.

He had had, on seeing her, an instant confidence, like that of a child. He wished to talk, to spread out the bright stuffs of his imagination for her. He had felt for a moment that she would perfectly value them. Now he was less sure, and with the same childish reaction he set himself in an attitude of timorous watchfulness. In this he was unjust. Her unreadiness to admit an intimacy was really an exaggeration of her respect for the personality of others. It was also a reflection of her self-sufficiency.

He would have been dumbfounded could he have

known that she had been aware of his advance and retreat, and that she had already formulated in her mind the terms and quality of their friendship.

"I must go. I ran in for a moment only to speak to Mabry. I had an engagement that kept me late." She glanced about the room once more and smiled. "Every one seems to be having a good time."

"What on earth do you do all the time, Marcia? I want to see you," said Brookes crossly. "If you don't invite me to something, I'll be forced to invite you; and you know I always have dull parties. Be a sport and ask me to dinner."

"In the face of such a dread alternative I'll have to. I must admit you have no talent for parties. Let me see, can you come next Tuesday?" She turned to Ives. "I shall be so happy if you can come with Brookes. I know your work, but I'll promise not to talk about it—"

"In that case he won't come," Brookes broke in.

"I certainly will, Mrs. Deering, and if you won't talk about my pictures, I will!"

"Then it's settled. Tuesday at a quarter to eight."

Again Ives had the uncomfortable sensation of impalpable barriers. Her easy speech and quick smile had such seeming transparency, but—what was it about her that was so baffling? She was like a gem whose bril-

liancy and beauty seemed so immediate but whose color and essence retreated from every approach to some remote and self-contained mystery. The revelation of her personality seemed so apparent, but her final reticence was complete.

To the casual observation she presented the appearance of any well-dressed, perfectly groomed woman of a cosmopolitan society, with perhaps something more of pride in her mien, and a more impersonal manner than was fashionable at the moment.

Only an imaginative observer would have paused at the expression of her eyes, so black that the pupil was indistinguishable from the iris. Her lively attention to the world about her was clearly not a participation, but her regard was too detached to be contemptuous. There was some inner fastness of the mind that held her consideration. There, Ives felt, in that hidden place was her secret in which she found her essential comfort, her strength and her inviolable refuge.

He shook himself free of further speculation. It was impertinent, he told himself, and a little presumptuous, as well, to elaborate fancies about some one he had known for only ten minutes. But as she left he had again a fleeting picture of curving banners moving to the secret music of some exclusive celebration.

"Poetizing about Marcia, I judge," said Brookes

acutely. "Don't be embarrassed. Every one does at first. If there is anything about her you don't understand, just rest assured that you never will."

"But what was she doing here?" Ives had a sudden rush of disgust for the crowd and its half drunken vaudeville. One or two bridge games had given way to dice, transferring play from tables to the floor. A Metropolitan soprano, notable usually for the restraint of her impersonations, was singing Charpentier's "Depuis le jour," transforming its spring-like passion into an orgiastic outburst.

Brookes was suddenly serious: "What are *you* doing here, old man? Marcia Deering is playing the world for nobody knows just what stakes. She puts coins on all sorts of numbers. I've known her a long time and I don't know any more than you do what she wins or what she loses, or, for that matter, what she is playing for."

"What about her husband—there is one, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Good chap. Corporation lawyer. Rich. Collects etchings and things. He's not in the picture. Marcia's unmarriageable, though—you know? There are such women."

Their talk rambled on. The clarifying effect of Marcia Deering's personality was lost in the feverish confusion. The gigolo person was playing jazz and a

number of couples were dancing a graphic representation of the galvanic music. It was now precisely the kind of party that is popularly supposed to be the diversion of the mad younger generation, but which is more often staged in thoroughgoing fashion by the older one.

Mabry had settled down to the comfort of a chaise longue in her bedroom and was listening to a spiced explanation by Dora O'Day of the sudden Broadway rise of a pretty but untalented movie actress. Brookes ensconced himself in a corner with the vivacious soprano who had given the fervid interpretation of the *Louise* aria.

"Don't go home," Mabry called as Ives passed her door. "Go on and dance. We'll all go to Reuben's for breakfast after a while."

He nodded in response. He was in no mood to go home, though he could not have said why he stayed. Something of the crazy tempo of this crazy night crept along his pulse. He had felt it before—often, since coming to New York. At first he had been bewildered and a little repelled by the reckless merry-go-round of the city's existence. It had seemed to him a little primitive and a negation of that sense of balance which informed proportioned living. Nevertheless, there was a fascination in the prodigal expenditure of the very stuff

of life which he observed everywhere. The street crowds, the theater audiences, the performers in revues, and those of all but a few ultra-conservative circles of society—all of them seemed to spend themselves with an infectious riotousness. He was somewhat amazed, and annoyed, that his own conservatism appeared to himself a bit niggard and slow in comparison.

As he thought back over his sheltered boyhood and secluded later years which had never touched on the gayer aspects of Continental life, he wondered if he had missed something. The simplicity of his own question made him smile. Surely he knew life well. This—he spread his hand in an unconscious half gesture toward the dizzy party—this was no phase of sophisticated living. It was adolescent stuff—the naïve license of an adolescent society celebrating the absurd discovery that the national puritanism is without authority.

A gentle suspicion that he was defending old inhibitions intruded itself on the argument. He felt oddly weakened in his superior assumptions.

He paused on his way down the room to examine a Florentine cabinet. The gracious proportions delighted him and he passed his fingers caressingly over the carving in which the softly colored wood had been brought to a singular expressiveness. What a sense of the value



of color and texture they had, those anonymous workers in the materials of decoration! On the top of it was an alabaster bowl filled with glass flowers that held an electric light—a modern but exquisite effect. Beside it was a lace fan in a glass case—a frailty of silk and thread that looked as if it would vanish at a breath. As he stepped back to squint at the effect he became aware of a girl leaning against the side of the cabinet. She was half in shadow and he realized that she must have been there all the while.

“Oh, I beg your pardon! I was admiring the cabinet and the arrangement. I didn’t see you at first; you were so still.”

She regarded him calmly, and took a sip from her cocktail before answering.

“So I noticed. I thought perhaps I was included in the effect you were approving.” Her voice was somewhat colorless, low-pitched and a little husky. Her inflection was so even that it sounded insolent.

“I would say that you add to it immeasurably.”

“Very good! Very good, Mr. Ives, after five minutes’ failure to distinguish me from the furniture. Will you have a cocktail? They are just there at your elbow.”

“Thank you, yes. You know my name. I don’t believe—”

"I am Leslie Pell. Mrs. Hamerick is my aunt. She's always talking about you. I was in the box next you at the theater tonight."

She straightened from her lazy, boyish posture, and he saw that she was taller than he had thought, very slim and all straight lines in the scant black dress that seemed to be mostly fringe. Her hair was trimmed close and fitted her well-shaped head like a black satin cap. She wore no rouge, which accentuated the startling scarlet of her lip-stick. Ives' quick eye noted that she managed her cigarette with accustomed skill.

"May I fill your glass?"

"Thanks."

They stood for a few moments in silence. The din of the piano discouraged conversation.

"Can't we sit somewhere—where it's quieter? Or perhaps you'd rather dance."

Her eyes rested on him for a moment with a faint look of amusement. He flushed a little but laughed without embarrassment.

"Your guess is quite accurate. I don't do it very well."

A quick look of contrition warmed her expression. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude—certainly, if you wish." She moved to place her glass on the table.

"Really, if you don't mind, I'd rather talk. Where—"

"There's the library across the hall. That's where Aunt Mabry reads *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker*!"

She edged her way through the swaying dancers. The "library" was quite empty, but a wood fire glowed in the fireplace and added a deeper tinge to the soft orange lights placed back of a black velvet Savoyard seat heaped with triangular pillows.

"It's the nicest place in the house."

"Isn't it?" Ives looked about appreciatively.

The walls were hung with ocher-colored silk on which a few Cameron etchings were judiciously placed. "I've never seen it before."

"It isn't used much, so it's just as the decorators left it."

There was no hint of mockery in her voice. "It's nice," she repeated.

"Do you live with Mrs. Hamerick?" he asked after a pause.

"No, I live by myself." Her reply sounded curt.

Ives felt a little rebuffed. Decidedly, she was difficult, he thought, in the way that he found the new young people difficult.

Again there was that swift expression of childish contrition on her face. She went on in her level voice, but more softly.

"Dad and Mother are divorced, and I don't hit it off with either of them very well."

"Oh, I'm sorry—"

She laughed. "Aunt Mabry looks after me!"

He joined in the laugh. They were suddenly on a better footing. This time the ensuing silence seemed more comfortable, but she continued to look at him in the disconcerting way young people had, as though he were something inanimate. Her eyes were blue, with distended pupils that gave them an appearance of oppressing excitement, and her expression, he realized, was a contradiction of her apparent poise.

"What do you do to amuse yourself?"

She lifted her shoulders in an oddly foreign gesture. "The usual things—not anything, perhaps, as you mean it. I have no talents. I like music, but I don't understand it very well. I think even that makes me unhappy." Her faint stress on the last words surprised him almost as much as the sudden loneliness in her eyes. It was his turn to be contrite. He had been talking down to her.

"Why do you say 'even that'?"

"Maybe I mean *especially* that. Music makes me uneasy because I don't understand what it does to me. I distrust it, I think. I—I feel that it may do some-

thing I don't expect. Oh—" she broke off impatiently. "I don't know what I'm saying. I'm not used to talking about my feelings."

"You surprise me. I had an idea—"

"Yes, I know; you had an idea that—" she hesitated.

"Go on," he urged.

"Oh, I suppose I'm talking about the orthodox attitude toward 'the younger generation.' All of you have it."

"All of whom?"

Her smile was apologetic. "The *older* generation."

"Thanks!" His tone was dry.

"Don't be offended. May I have a cigarette? . . . Thank you." She leaned back and crossed her knees. The fringed skirt fell away and revealed the fluent lines of her long, straight legs.

"You know what I mean," she continued as she blew slender shafts of smoke at the fire. "It's silly, lumping us all together. Younger people differ just as much—they are just as individual as—well, as old—older ones. They feel—" She stopped and added whimsically, "What are we talking about anyway?"

"We were talking about music. Now that music," he nodded in the direction of the music room, "what does it do to you?"

"Nothing when I'm dancing. It's just a design for my feet."

"But when you're not dancing?" he persisted.

"Well—probably the same thing it does to you." The corners of her eyes crinkled acutely.

"Mrs. Ives is a pianist, I believe," she went on in a changed tone. "Mr. Parker often talks of her playing. Will she play in New York?"

"Next season, perhaps. She is also a harpsichordist, but she plays the piano magnificently. I think she has given the harpsichord much of her time the last few years."

"Oh, yes? I've heard Landowska."

"Great, isn't she? Astrid—Mrs. Ives is going to spend a fortnight with her in Paris before coming over."

Their talk drifted to discussion of the season's concerts and plays. Her opinions were decided but not very critical.

He watched her with growing interest as her air of mocking insolence gave way to a more becoming friendliness. Her characterizations of various people they both knew were apt, and pungent with an impersonal malice. Her sophistication was thorough enough but did not succeed in concealing an enthusiastic curiosity which retreated at slightest notice, veiling

itself in a shallow cynicism. At such moments she irritated him into a middle-aged desire to shake her, or box her ears.

A party of four or five, headed by Dora O'Day, broke into the room. They stopped short in mock apology.

"Oh-h! *Excuse* us!" they shrieked, and fell on each other with shouts of drunken laughter. Ives arose, but Leslie did not turn.

"Damn fools," she remarked tersely.

The party made a noisy retreat and Leslie flung her cigarette into the fireplace.

"Let's go somewhere."

"Certainly. Where do you want to go? A night club? It isn't too late."

"No; that would be just some more of this."

"Well—"

"Let's get a taxi—do you mind?—and ride a while. We can join them at Reuben's, if you want to."

"Delighted. Air'll be good for us. I suppose I ought to say good night to Mabry in case—"

"Oh, no. I don't fancy the delicate attentions of that crowd if they see us leave. Just a minute. I'll get my coat."

She was back in a twinkling, enveloped in a fur wrap. "It's just two flights down. Let's walk."

The hall man was asleep in a tall Spanish chair.

"Don't wake him. We can find a taxi. There are always some in the court." She ran ahead and Ives followed, feeling suddenly very wide awake and gay.

"Br-r-r. It's cold. Do you see a heated one? Oh, here we are."

"Where to, sir?"

"Anywhere for a while until I tell you."

"'Right. Take a turn or two around the Park—all right?"

"Anywhere at all—yes, the Park."

## VII

The night was still and brilliantly moonlit. The deserted Park, glistening under heavy snow that muffled the taxi's progress, seemed infinitely remote from the glittering bulk of the city coiled about it. The silence and mystery of the night worked its instant spell on Ives. Mabry's party dropped away, far away, as though measureless time and space intervened. The oppression of the city lifted, its disturbing urge quieted, and an almost opiate peace came over him that harmonized subtly with the mood of intimacy that enveloped him and the girl at his side. Neither of them spoke.

The rapid clink of the tire chains resolved itself into



a steady musical undertone through which the click of the meter sounded sharply.

"Cold?"

She shook her head.

"Cigarette?"

She shook her head again.

The long irregular façade of Fifth Avenue slid by like the ghost of a dead city. The taxi wound its way through the intricate drives of the upper park, then down by the frozen lakes and eastward again where the tall, white cliffs of the Plaza towered. A few scattered lights burned in the upper stories.

"Where do you live?" Leslie asked abruptly.

"East Seventieth—that is, I have a house there. My studio is on Gramercy Park. I stay there most of the time now."

"I've never seen any of your pictures. Are there any on exhibition?"

"There are a few at Durand's. I'd like to take you to see them."

"Will you, really?"

"I'd rather you'd see some I have at the studio. Will you come down sometime?"

"I certainly will. Isn't it funny, I've never been in a painter's studio."

"Mine doesn't look like the ones you see in the

movies. It's big and bare and thoroughly ugly. It's a workroom. You'll see."

She shivered and drew her furs close.

"Are you cold?"

"I believe I am, a little."

"Perhaps we had better have some coffee. Then I'll take you home, unless you want to join that breakfast party."

She made a little gesture of distaste.

"And tomorrow, if you like, I'll take you to the studio."

She sat up straight. "Let's go there and have the coffee."

"You mean—now?"

"Yes, couldn't we? It *is* tomorrow anyway. Let's!"

He caught her mood instantly. "Will you come? I think that will be fun."

He leaned forward and gave the address to the chauffeur. As they sped down the long stretch of the avenue Leslie became animated again.

### VIII

"Good Lord, it's cold in here. I had forgotten the heat would be off. Keep on your coat. I'll have a fire in a minute and some coffee."

Leslie came slowly into the room, blinking and

screwing up her face in the white glare of the arc-light like a child awakened from sleep.

"Here—curl up in a corner of this. I'll give you a rug until the fire is going." He wheeled a shabby divan near the grate and unfolded a steamer rug. "Better put your feet up. There."

"Oh, that's cozy." She looked about the room. "It is kind of—"

"Yes, it is. It's a workroom."

The studio was two stories in height with a balcony on two sides. The huge window was uncurtained. There were no rugs and the corners were filled with canvases and frames.

He was rummaging behind a screen for wood and kindling. She settled deeper into her furs. The air of the room was Arctic. After considerable fussing a small blaze took reluctant hold on the logs.

"There. I'll switch off those blistering lights. They're likely to give you sunstroke." He lit some candles on the mantel.

"Now for some coffee. Are you freezing?"

She made an inarticulate answer and Ives busied himself behind the screen once more with the coffee things.

The room warmed slowly. Presently there was the gurgling sound of a percolator and the aroma of coffee

drifted from the screened recess. He searched for cups, which had to be washed, but eventually he emerged with a tray which he placed on a low coffee table by the fire.

"All ready?"

She did not answer and as he spoke again he saw that she had fallen asleep. Her face was in shadow but he could see the slow, regular breathing. One hand lay palm upward outside her coat which had fallen open. The room was still cold and he folded the fur closely about her and tucked the rug to her feet. He stood for a few moments looking at her, then poured himself a cup of coffee, pushed a chair nearer the fire, and sat down.

The logs kindled to a livelier blaze and the coffee was cheering. He lit a cigarette and stretched comfortably. Leslie slept soundly. He wondered if he should wake her and take her home, but he remembered that she had spoken of living alone, so he supposed no one would be concerned about her. Might as well let her sleep . . . A bit unconventional, but she looked tired out. Probably never got enough sleep. He thought of Mabry and the rag-tag that lingered to the end of her party. Rotten gang for this kid. A disturbing recollection of Marcia Deering crossed his musings and he glanced uncomfortably toward the couch.

. . . Jove! He *was* tired. Idiotic to stay up all night. He wriggled into a more comfortable position.

It was nearly dawn. He decided he would wake her after a while. There was something appealing about her dropping off to sleep like that—like a child, he thought—rather sweet and naïve.

His thoughts wandered aimlessly—"mental sail-flapping," Brookes called it. People and places and fragments of remembered conversation flitted, cinema-like, through his mind. Gradually a gray light crept over the big studio window.

He sat up and looked at his watch. It was seven-thirty. Leslie had turned over and burrowed under the rug. He rubbed the back of his head with a perplexed gesture and set about replenishing the fire.

The candles were guttering in their sockets. He extinguished them, and once more rubbed the back of his head with an air of indecision.

"Well," he said to himself, "I suppose breakfast is the next thing."

He changed his coat for a studio jacket and disappeared into the kitchenette. In twenty minutes a tea table was spread with scrambled eggs, toast and coffee, all that the larder yielded.

"Well, young lady," he called. She stirred but didn't

answer. He lifted the coat from her face and she opened her eyes and stared unrecognizingly at him.

"The coffee you mentioned last night is ready!"

She sat up suddenly and looked around. "Why—what? Why, it's daylight! How long have I been asleep? Oh, how stupid of me! Why didn't you wake me? What time is it?"

"It's time for breakfast, and I didn't wake you because I may have dozed a little myself, and it isn't stupid to sleep when you're sleepy, and you slept two or three hours, and—what were the other questions?"

"Oh, dear. I know you were uncomfortable and hated me for a nuisance. How silly to go to sleep! But I haven't had much sleep for two or three days. I must have been awfully tired. M-m-m! That smells so good. I hope you don't mind. Shall I pour the coffee?"

After breakfast Ives vetoed her announcement that she must go.

"Have you forgotten the pictures? You don't suppose an artist would allow a victim to escape so easily, do you? Sit down—no—over there. There is going to be an exhibition of pictures and pictures and pictures."

He began hauling out canvases and slipping them into exhibition frames, giving scant attention to her comments as he stood back and scrutinized them. He was scarcely aware of her. All at once he was the

painter intent on critical consideration of his work. Picture succeeded picture. Sometimes he stood for many minutes without speaking.

Leslie looked at her wrist watch. "Oh, dear! It has stopped. What time is it, please?"

"Nearly eleven."

"Good heavens, I must go!" She sprang up and put on her coat.

"I'll run along with you and drop you."

"Just a minute—" The telephone interrupted him. He picked up the receiver impatiently.

"Hello."

"Is this Mr. Robert Ives?" The voice was unfamiliar.

"Yes."

"This is Dora O'Day, Mr. Ives."

"Yes."

"I'm speaking for Mabry Hamerick. I'm at her apartment. She's been trying to get in touch with Leslie this morning, and the maid says she didn't come in last night. I thought maybe you—" she hesitated. Ives cast a wild look at Leslie.

"What? Miss Pell?"

"Yes. You were talking to her late last night. I—we thought you might have heard her say where she was going."

"Why—no. I didn't hear her say, Miss O'Day."

"All right. I suppose she spent the night with friends. Sorry to have bothered you. I—we thought you might know. Mabry just wants to get in touch with her. Good-by."

"Good-by."

He turned slowly. "It was Miss O'Day. She's at Mrs. Hamerick's and asked about you. They know you didn't go home last night. I couldn't say—"

"Of course not. None of their business. That wasn't Aunt Mabry's doing. It was Dora O'Day. You remember she came in last night while we were in the library. Oh, well, I'll tell them something. It would sound a little queer, wouldn't it?"

They rode uptown in silence. At her door he stood holding her hand for a moment. "I hope I didn't blunder this morning over the telephone."

"Oh—that's nothing—" The wind whipped her coat open and blew the long fringes of her evening dress up across her face. At the same time he saw her eyes widen with dismay. He turned to look straight into the smiling face of Dora O'Day.





## *Part II*

### I

A shrewish spring was making belated appearance. The little square of Gramercy Park was shrill with the high-pitched green of young leaves that for several days had shivered in the treacherous cold.

Ives stood at his studio window looking down on the late afternoon animations of this sheltered bit of New York. A score or so of the Park's residents who had access to the fenced enclosure, lured by the deceptive sunshine, were strolling about the walks or sitting on the damp benches. It looked like spring, but it felt like winter. He hated the ungenerous reluctance of the season. Nevertheless change was in the air. Always quick to note such things, he was aware of the slightly lagging sound of footsteps that had taken the place of the quick, winter staccato. Voices came up, too, with a subtle lyric quality, as though normal speech were about to give way to song.

He thought of the European springs: Italy, Spain, France, England. They had been spectacles—external transformations, tides of light and color to be apprehended in the terms and values of paint. He had al-

ways welcomed change of season: the coming of summer, autumn or winter equally with spring. Seasons meant pageantry, a fresh stimulus for his work. He could not recall that he had ever reacted to the sentimental moods of seasons. Perhaps when he had been very young; he could not remember. Certainly he had always liked all kinds of weather. It was typical of him, and illuminating, that he could for the moment think of seasons in terms of weather. The external world had existed for him merely as a starting point in the creation of his mysterious landscapes. That inner world of his fancy from which he drew these strange pictures was a land of retreat where his real self had gone on its ways, untroubled by adventures of emotion or the impact of concrete change.

Today he was disturbed; doubly disturbed that he was so. Nothing very tangible had followed that unfortunate encounter with Dora O'Day. Neither he nor Leslie knew what Miss O'Day had said, or indeed if she had even mentioned the meeting to any one. Leslie had been sure that she would talk. It would be only natural.

Sometimes they had thought themselves the targets of oblique glances and the subjects of sly smiles, but they could not be sure. They might have imagined it,

all the more since they were expecting something of the kind.

It was no thought of these matters that sent him pacing up and down the studio, or out on long walks through unknown sections of the city. Besides, all of that had been weeks ago. There came a sudden memory of a night on a tropic beach, years before, when the stillness and the starry skies gave no hint of the coming storm. He remembered the hoarse threat of the long, slow, premonitory rollers that swept in from the sea. What was there in this chilly northern spring afternoon to recall that night of disaster?

He closed the casement and flung himself on the divan—the same one on which Leslie had fallen asleep the first time she came to the studio. The room was much changed since that night. The floor was carefully waxed and partially covered with rugs. The disorder of canvases and frames was gone, and several additional pieces of furniture gave the room a more habitable aspect. A huge bowl of tulips stood on the table back of the divan. A dying fire smoldered in the fireplace.

## II

Life had been, for Robert Ives, such a logical and normal progress of events. His boyhood in New Or-

leans, the city of his birth, had been peculiarly sheltered. Left an orphan at eight, he had spent the next ten years with his French grandmother in the cloistered life of the old French quarter. At eighteen, definitely committed to the career of an artist, he had been sent to the care of relatives in Paris. He had lived at St. Cloud, and had been a witness of, rather than a participant in, the student life of the city. Any natural inclination that he may have had to indulge in the flings of youth were further inhibited by a timidity which was a part of his charm, and by a fastidiousness that gave him oftentimes a misleading air of disdainful aloofness.

His talent and serious application brought the usual rewards. The death of his grandmother left him with a considerable fortune and there followed a period of wandering—mostly in the lonelier regions of remoter countrysides.

A chance meeting with a sympathetic Norwegian painter took him to Norway one summer. The generous enthusiasm of his Norwegian acquaintances brought him his first important exhibition in Christiania. It was at this exhibition that he met Astrid Borg, the daughter of an army officer. She was even then a remarkable pianist, but with no thought of a professional career. The attraction was mutual. She

had liked his deferential manner, broken by quick enthusiasms and headlong rushes of words, checked again by sudden silences as though he felt that he had said too much. It was an engaging trick that he had never lost.

Astrid was different from any one he had known. She was not beautiful, but she had a vitality that enveloped her with a sort of splendor.

A comradeship established itself. She viewed his pictures with the ready enthusiasm she had for all works of art, while he listened to her playing in much the same way. Marriage to Astrid meant a larger freedom. To him, at that time, it meant an end to a loneliness that often verged on morbidity.

During the years that followed they lived much in out-of-the-way places of Europe. Astrid often spent long periods in Vienna or Paris studying. Ives' reputation grew steadily.

Lately Astrid had begun playing professionally and the critics were beginning to assign her an important place among the serious women pianists.

Everything had happened so naturally—coming as expected events after prepared causes—without surprise or violence.

Now, all at once, this bewildering sense of disorientation.

He kept reaching back to the past, remembering, assorting memories, examining them, in a sort of desperate effort to connect it with the present and re-establish that feeling of continuity that seemed to him necessary because it had always existed. Perhaps, he thought, he would be able to understand himself, and rationalize his states of mind if he could find the roots of the present in some lost or obscure aspects of the past. It was characteristic of him and his conservative rearing that he should have more faith in the ordered sequence of those conventional years than he had in these convulsive and unsettling impulses that sprang from unknown and unsuspected depths of his nature.

He realized that he had always lived defensively. He had always been unconsciously on guard; but sustained defenses against an enemy who never attacks are apt to become ineffective. Nothing happened from without or within to warrant any sense of insecurity in a world which seemed to carry him forward beneficently toward beneficent, if somewhat unexciting, ends.

His was not, surely, the commonplace perturbation of conscience, or any unease arising from moral disturbance. He had not—and the discovery aroused in him no surprise—the normal equipment of this kind. He had the unmoral attitude of those rootless cosmopolitans who move easily from country to country and

from one set of manners and customs to another with no sense of dislocation. Children, too, are like that.

It was not Leslie—or (he found himself stumbling mentally) Marcia, or—certainly not—any conventional feeling about Astrid that sent these disquieting rumors along the fibers of his nerves. Astrid—well, Astrid was something complete and sufficient to herself. It was surprising to find—thinking about it for the first time in years—how little he knew about what went on in her head or heart, what she might think or feel about him, or life, or the world. She had somehow—mysteriously—become not only detached, but enclosed—remote. Perhaps he appeared to her in the same way. No, decidedly there was nothing about Astrid . . . He knew that he might do whatever he chose with his thoughts, his life even, and Astrid would go calmly on with the careful, slow, accurate development of her playing.

And Marcia—what was she in all of this? What was she to him, or he to her? He had never been sure of anything about her since that memorable dinner at her home.

He had never met any one who exerted such contradictory influences upon him. She seemed at times to be the very heart of that mystery which haunted his pictures. He felt sometimes that he had come upon



something that he had always sought, some resolution of that suspense hovering with a tremulous insecurity between reality and unreality, which lay always upon every manifestation of the external world as he saw it.

Even now, as he thought of her, he had a simultaneous impression of that meaning beyond appearance which afflicted his awareness of nature. Every slightest turn of a leaf, every delicate print of shadow, all the swift fluctuation of color that struck upon his eyes, tormented him with a poetry concealed by appearance. It was this that he had struggled to realize in paint. It was this surprise that he had so patiently stalked through years and which had led him in his painting further and further away from literal renderings until his peculiar disintegrations of form and his dazzling intensifications of color had all but discouraged his critics. But even this phase of his work had finally found acceptance and he had been acclaimed the greatest of mystical painters. Mystical—yes, he agreed, as his musing continued, if mysticism is a groping for some experience outside of actuality, for some hint of a constant goal toward which the currents of change are tending, some hidden agreement between the appearance of things and the mood they arouse.

What was it, just, about Marcia that suggested these subtle harmonies?

He had experienced such a delighted surprise when he found one of his own paintings on her library wall—one that had always rested particularly in his own affections because it was one of the first in which he had successfully suggested a hushed mood of waiting as though for some unrevealed aspect of the scene to become visible.

That dinner at Marcia Deering's; he remembered it uncomfortably. It had been rather an inauspicious beginning to what was now an established friendship. She had impressed him just as at the first meeting. They had talked at once as old acquaintances with none of the usual tentative approaches and retreats which make the establishing of new relations so tedious. She accepted him so completely, seeming to be in agreement with him before he spoke, quite as though a common point of view had been reached through a long period of many minute adjustments. But he had come away with an oppressive feeling of her importance to him—a feeling that had not the corollary comfort of a reciprocal attitude. He was once more aware of her essential solitariness. Perhaps it was not different from the essential solitariness of every human being, only more apparent in a personality and character of such crystalline qualities, but he felt shut out, nevertheless, as a child feels shut out from the concerns of adults.

Since then he had been seeing her with increasing frequency.

She was, for him, an adventure in personality, and a curiously exciting one. Apparently she was not moved by the usual forces that direct and shape the lives of people. She was somehow self-active and, so far as he could guess, correspondingly self-satisfying. At least, he amended, she did not lean on casual approval for her peace of mind. It had astonished him to discover that an unspoken and undefined lack of approbation attached to her. It was not positive, or active; it was a reservation—the reservation society holds for those whose poise and inner satisfactions do not derive from obvious sources. The diagnoses ranged widely. Less attractive women said intellectual vanity; less intelligent ones said lovers. Both accusations secretly pleased Marcia, since neither was true.

Something of these contradictory aspects of her, he decided, constituted much of her mystery. Perhaps it was, after all, just a sort of remoteness, rather than mystery; but whatever it was it permeated his thought and altered his view of the immediate world.

Leslie's part in his perturbation of spirit was much clearer. They had been precipitated, almost by chance, into an intimacy that might never otherwise have been. This circumstance gave him a sudden near view of

her. It had been surprising to find that her air of insolent bravado and blasé sophistication was little more than a façade giving no hint of the lonely and rather bewildered girl behind it. The family circumstances that left her adrift in a gay and self-sufficient society forced her to conceal a sensitiveness and dependence which were not current qualities among her acquaintances. She had made the best of them by assuming an indifference that served fairly well as a screen for those qualities popularly supposed to be extinct in the younger generation. Leslie, like many others, found silence an effective protection, and if it frightened away most of the predatory young men of her set and excluded her from many of the hilarious younger parties, it spared her those lacerations of feeling which a naturally affectionate nature receives from the supercilious wonder of those who are differently constituted.

Much of this was at once apparent to Ives and he had more or less unconsciously set it in contrast with Marcia's mature and experienced adjustment. He sensed that, for all of Marcia's gallant parade, the compromises she made with life were such as left bitterness in their wake. This was too much in the vein of that wearier civilization and disillusioned society he had known in Europe to be particularly interesting to him. He felt that in the newer conditions of a new order

of things perhaps something different was possible. Perhaps this spectacular and much discussed younger generation were to make the new approach. The thought turned his scrutiny anew on Leslie. He did not trick himself, however, into a belief that his interest in her was of an abstract sociological nature. All of the artist in him was acutely aware of her personal charm, of the dynamic range of that charm, compounded, as it was, of the double virginity of body and mind and the exquisite detail of her unobtrusive loveliness.

Abnormally sensitive to the shock of personality, he had held himself suspended in the insulated medium of his dream world. Now, suddenly—and it was not clear to him how it had come about—he no longer found the protection adequate. The old securities had shattered under the impact of New York's violence. He was invaded, as he had never before been invaded, and possessed by new people and new feelings. All of his well-arranged world was in tumult. It was surprising to find the confusion not unpleasant. There was in it the deep disquiet of anticipation.

He stopped abruptly in his restive pacing, looked at his watch and flung the last of the afternoon's chain of cigarettes into the fire. He looked distastefully at an unfinished canvas on the easel, wheeled it nearer the fading light and studied it closely and apparently with

more satisfaction than at first. He picked up palette and brushes but considered the light once more, laid them down again and pushed the easel into a corner.

Tea, he thought; and busied himself at once with the preparations. He placed two cups on the tray; some one might drop in—Leslie perhaps. He knew very well no one else would, since all of his acquaintances knew that his studio was sacred to work. Leslie alone made free with his hours. He lighted the alcohol lamp and rummaged for more cigarettes.

The kettle purred and gave off clouds of steam. He lowered the flame and waited. The afternoon light went out like a lamp and the studio loomed darkly beyond the semi-circle of soft light from the dying fire.

The note of the kettle changed. Most of the water had boiled away. He refilled it and sat down again. The studio window showed deep blue like cathedral glass. He continued to smoke.

The sound of a buzzer rasped the silence. He was at the door in an instant.

"Hello, Leslie. I hoped you would come—half thought you might. I've been waiting tea."

"Tea? Good! Miserably cold out. Oh, it's dark in here. Are you by yourself?—I don't want to step on any one."

"Just a minute, I'll switch on lights—"

"Oh, please don't. It's lovely—that firelight on the tea things. Stir the fire—it will be light enough."

She loosened her furs. "Painting today? Going well? Shall I pour the tea?"

"Yes to all three questions. Awfully glad you came—" The words trailed off and neither spoke for a while.

"Cigarette?"

"Yes, please."

He held a lighted match for her and they were silent again.

A log snapped in the fireplace and a bright flame sprang up. The light fell full on her face, surprising a look of brooding that was not exactly habitual. It was as though secrets nestled in the shadow of her features. She looked up, smiled a little, and the illusion passed.

"Leslie, do you know Mrs. Deering very well?" Even as he asked the question he recognized some significance in the fact that neither of them had ever spoken of her before. Also he perceived a sudden pause in her expression as if the question were not unanticipated. Just so a creature of the wild stops dead still at a distant sound of alarm. She did not look at him.

"Mrs. Deering? Yes—no, not really well. We're not exactly contemporaries.

"I'm sorry," she added after a moment. "That was

catty. I didn't mean to say just that. But—there's considerable distance between us in many ways, I suppose. I've never thought about it—exactly. Why did you ask?"

"Well, I wondered—that's all. I find her extremely interesting, but puzzling."

"What don't you understand about her?"

"Now, Leslie, don't say she's clear enough to another woman. That's a typical feminine thrust."

"But I didn't say it."

"You meant it, though, didn't you?"

"She doesn't puzzle me."

"Well, then, what *do* you think of her?"

"In what way?"

"Don't be contrary. Suppose I had never seen her. How would you describe her to me?"

She laughed. "I wouldn't. I wouldn't be interested enough."

"Oh, come now, Leslie. You know she is unusual and interesting."

"I didn't say she isn't, but I wouldn't be telling you about her."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want you to like her."

"Then you admit—"

"That I like you a lot myself? Of course."



"That isn't what I was going to say."

"I know what you were going to say. But I wanted to tell you—" She hesitated.

"I like you, too, Leslie." He reached out and laid his hand over hers. "I like you more than—than any one I've met in a long time."

The light was too dim to see her clearly, but he sensed the same arrest in her thought that he had felt before. He turned abruptly toward her.

"Leslie, what do you want me to be to you?"

"What do you want to be?"

"Please don't fence with me."

"I'm not fencing." Her voice dropped a little in pitch but retained its levelness. She spoke slowly as from repression.

"You may be—I want you to be anything you wish."

"Leslie, I think I'm very much in love with you—in some sort of way that I don't perhaps quite understand. That isn't a very whole-hearted thing to say—maybe not very flattering, but I'm not sure I know what I feel—"

"I know. Just please don't say anything you don't quite mean. I'm not asking anything of you."

He arose and faced her. "I'm not sure just what it is I'm asking of you."

"It doesn't matter. I am whatever you ask, I suppose."

"Leslie, dear." He leaned forward and lifted her to her feet. He felt his arms tremble as he held her close and kissed her, and his voice was unsteady. "Leslie, dear, dear, dear! I hadn't thought—I'm not thinking now. This seems rather terrible somehow, but I know I've wanted to hold you and kiss you and say that I love you. I love you—and like you. I'm not asking—"

She waited. "What?"

"I'm not asking you to be my mistress, Leslie; please understand—"

"It's all right—Robert." She looked very straight into his eyes and put her hands on his shoulders. "It's all right, whatever you ask. I would be even that if you wish."

He drew her very close again. "You darling. Whatever we are going to be to each other we will be. Whatever is to happen will come of itself. We can't plan it—can't plan anything deliberately. It is enough to know—just this, isn't it?"

She did not answer, but her arms tightened about him.

They stood for several minutes in the semi-dark.

"Don't go home yet. Why not stay and have a little supper here in the studio? I'll go out and get something. Can't you?"

"I'll have to telephone Leonie. I told her I'd be back at seven-thirty. What time is it? . . . Oh, well. She's

used to me. I'm so glad you asked me to stay. I didn't want to go home."

He switched on the lights and struggled into a coat. Both of them were all at once gay and laughing. The tension of the hour was past. Both of them felt that a chapter had been closed and a new one begun. A sense of exploration and discovery was upon them—a feeling that they must hasten to arrange a new world and establish themselves in it.

"What shall I get? Are you hungry?"

"I think I am. It doesn't matter. Anything that looks good. I'll have the table ready."

He stopped at the door. "Don't forget to telephone your apartment."

"Oh, poor Leonie! I had already forgotten."

He came back and kissed her gayly.

"Happy, darling—a little?"

"More than a little, Robert—very happy," she replied gravely.

### III

The fire was replenished and the table cleared. A Spanish star-lantern glimmered high in a corner of the studio. Leslie curled herself in a corner of the deep seat and sipped a tiny liqueur while Ives talked.

He was moved to an extraordinary eloquence. Like

many shy natures he was capable on rare occasions of floods of speech.

It was the first time, lately, that any one had found admission into that world of his fancy from which his pictures derived. For the moment the tantalizing necessity of rendering that world in the permanent and personal expression of paint gave way to the immediate expression of words. He was suddenly an artist in a new medium.

Perhaps he was in his odd way making love to her. Perhaps her intuition told her this, for she listened and was content.

He lifted up his revelations of beauty, turned them now this way, now that—juggling with them.

She may not have seen exactly what he wished her to see, but what she did see was his artist mind and the place of its abode, and into that place she went unhesitatingly, leaving her own world behind. She even pictured herself, a little vaguely, moving through enchanted landscapes guarding with close-cupped hands a slender flame that she well knew might consume her utterly or leave her frozen above its dead ashes.

#### IV

Leaving Leslie at her apartment in East Sixty-fifth Street, Ives strolled undecidedly toward Fifth Avenue.

He looked at his watch: it was nearly two o'clock. His empty house a few blocks away seemed uninviting. At the same time he felt that he could not return to the studio just now. The evening had stirred him deeply, and the receding turbulence, now that he was alone, left him shaken and confused.

He turned down the avenue, and quickened his step. The poignancy of his emotion must be matched by some sort of action. The studio was impossible.

He was rather aghast at the deep disturbance that shook along his nerves. He shivered, partly from the cold. What was this that had happened to him and to his world that had always seemed so secure? He could not have been more amazed had the stars suddenly slipped into new patterns.

What was it Brookes Parker had said? "There is a sense of destiny about you . . . life hasn't begun on you yet" . . . something like that. The recollection of the phrases laid an instant oppression on his spirit. He felt that life had indeed "begun on him." The premonitory murmur of agitation that troubled his afternoon musing had risen to wild tumult.

For the first time in his life he felt that he was being moved by forces outside of himself. This was, he reflected whimsically, a sense of destiny with a vengeance.

The momentary flash of humor released his mental tension and restored his perspective a bit. What was all of this agitation about? He had become interested in a pretty girl; he was in some sort of way, not perfectly classifiable, in love with her; he had kissed her: what of it? It wasn't startling enough to send him into such a midnight raptus. He walked on more slowly, searching his pockets for a cigarette. Life had for so long offered nothing unexpected. He had even dreaded the unexpected, but now he was all at once alert. He realized that he had never been so much aware of his emotional self as now. It emphasized a detachment that, once past, assumed all the qualities of a lost security.

The present was without a perceptible pattern, and he had always been accustomed to patterns.

Leslie, Marcia Deering—and Astrid! The thought of Astrid came almost violently upon him. He actually had not thought of her—or had he? There had always been a kind of uneasiness accompanying Leslie. It was Astrid, of course. Just what would Astrid think, or feel, or do about it?

Now he knew that under the flimsy shield of consciousness the whole matter had been gone over by the faculties of his unconscious mind. Something somewhere in his brain had taken count of her, had estimated, judged, adjusted. It was as though he had

thought it all out. He knew he hadn't—consciously, but there it was complete, done by some secret agency hidden deep in himself. It was quite as though some other person whose wisdom was reliable, and welcome, had assured him that Astrid would not be deeply concerned. She had always been self-sufficient and self-sustaining. She fed her spirit and her mind and her emotions on great art. She had always been detached—almost inhuman at times in her complete absorption in music. Astrid wouldn't actually care. She would be kindly indulgent in that large, calm way of hers. No, decidedly, he need not be disturbed by Astrid.

The reassurance spun itself out like a legend, seemingly of no volition of his own. It lulled the disorder that had assailed him and his spirits lifted again, almost blithely. He decided, after all, that he would return to the studio for the night. The house uptown would not be really habitable until Astrid returned. That, by the way, would be soon. She would be sailing next week.

Reaching the studio he slipped into a dressing gown and settled into a deep chair. He was not sleepy. He tried to read but it was difficult to concentrate. He would find himself turning the page without the slightest recollection of the words his eye had followed.

That unsettling quiver, half apprehension, half an undefinable excitement, shook through him again.

He reached out abruptly and lifted the receiver of the telephone at his side. His fingers automatically dialed her number.

"Hello, Leslie? . . . Isn't this idiotic of me to call you, but I wanted to hear your voice again. Did I wake you? . . . At the studio—I couldn't go to sleep. I felt that I must hear you and tell you once more that I love you . . . Truly—you do, dear? I wonder what's going to happen to us. It isn't right, you know, but I can't want it differently . . . You're a darling to say so. Shall I see you tomorrow? . . . Yes, I can. About four? . . . Fine! . . . Yes, I do. I can't even wish I didn't. . . . All right, good night, dearest, dearest."

He sat for a few minutes still holding the telephone, then he arose and went slowly upstairs to his bedroom.

V

Astrid arrived the first week in June. The house in East Seventieth had been prepared in advance, but she had been busy the first day or two rearranging things in readiness for the hot weather which came suddenly after the chilly spring.

Two or three days later Ives was sitting in the library reading. Astrid was in the music room which



was situated at the back on the same floor. The sound of the piano came faintly through the closed door.

She was practicing very slowly and very carefully. The even, perfectly measured tone proceeded with utmost deliberation. Occasionally she stopped and then followed a rush of sound as she tried a passage, then she began again the slow, thoughtful practice. She went on and on. An hour lengthened to two—to three. Apparently there was not the slightest diminution of her attention or the slightest faltering of her interest which drilled and disciplined her hands in perfect obedience to her purpose. It was almost uncanny—that long-sustained regularity—not quite human. She was working on the Schumann Toccata. Knowing her and her methods so well, he was interested to see just what she was striving for and how she accomplished it. She was seeking an exact balance between the technical interest and the musical content of the merciless composition.

She tried it through again at full speed. He could not but admire the seeming effortlessness of the result as though some superhuman machine warmed with intelligence suddenly swept aside the obstinate difficulties. But apparently she was not yet satisfied with the result, for she resumed once more the painfully slow but rhythmical practice. He took up the book he had laid aside and read fitfully. The house and Astrid's

presence laid an odd sense of restraint on him. It was indefinable and all the more uncomfortable since it was not actual.

Leslie had gone to Boston with Mabry Hamerick. He had had a letter from her this morning, the first since her departure ten days before. He unfolded the heavy gray sheets and read it again. Her writing was very black and Gothic, making its way across the page in great, jagged characters like the outline of a violent seismographic record. There was humorous comment on Aunt Mabry and a sketchy account of the days' occupations. It was not a love letter, but just the kind of telegraphic communication characteristic of the unsentimental young people of today. Only near the bottom of the last page following an inky erasure a wild sentence began in a crowded space and turned up the margin. "*What will it be like to have your arms around me again if your letters can shake me so?*"

He turned back to the first page and reread the spirited lines, coming again on that last outburst with the same mingled sense of dismay and tingling of nerves he had felt on reading it the first time. It was characteristic of her odd matter-of-fact way. There were no shades of coquetry or reluctance in her recognition of the situation—no half disclosures and coy retreats. It had been so from the first.

She was without self-consciousness as she was without shallow insincerities. It had been perfectly illustrative of her freedom and simplicity, her falling asleep in his studio that first night of their acquaintance. In the same way she had frankly accepted his later feeling for her and as frankly revealed her own for him. She had been able to say without hesitation, "I love you, too," quite as if it were a matter of course, to answer the ardor of his emotion and immediately return to casual conversation. She seemed incapable of slyness or indirection. This very quality gave to their relation some property of rightness. That she could be utterly reckless in her inability to stoop to subterfuge occurred to him. In this he misjudged her. A common-sense prudence was inherent in her feeling of fairness to him and in a protective instinct growing out of her knowledge that she had met him squarely halfway. Her discretion was not caution, but a by-product of her actual reticence. The secretive air that seemed to lurk at times beneath her half insolent and disconcerting composure was nothing more than the defense of a sensitive nature. In her world of young people there was no quarter for sensitiveness and she knew it. She met the actual heartlessness of youth with a corresponding indifference.

Leslie Pell had the not altogether singular misfor-

tune of belonging neither to the world of young people in which she necessarily moved somewhat, nor to the maturer society in which she was perforce thrust by Mabry Hamerick. It was this that he had recognized ten minutes after their first meeting. The look of a bewildered soul, he had said to himself.

He folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket-book.

Astrid was playing the last movement of the *Appassionata* Sonata, and the Dionysian measures struck across his present mood with disquieting effect.

He did not hear the steps on the stair until Brookes Parker stood at the door.

"Hello, Brookes! Well, this is pleasant. Come in."

"Thanks. I'm lunching uptown and stopped in to see Astrid. She's hard at it already, I hear."

"Yes. She began yesterday. I'll call her—"

"No, no! Don't interrupt. I'll wait a bit. How are you?—all right? Strikes me you look a bit seedy."

"First hot weather, I guess."

"Better get out of town a little. Why don't you and Astrid come up to Ranley for the week-end?" Ranley was Brookes' place on the Hudson. "Everything's ship-shape now. I've really gone out to stay. My sister is there for the summer. She'll be delighted."

"Thanks, Brookes. I think we probably can't this

week. Perhaps next, if that suits you. Astrid's hardly settled yet."

"Well, any time—"

They chatted intermittently in the fashion of friends who understand each other with few words. Brookes' casual-appearing glance rested two or three times intently on his friend's face with a fleeting expression of perplexity. Something up with the old boy, he thought. Gone a little stale on his painting, maybe.

Astrid was practicing slowly again with the controlled regularity of a machine.

"Gad, how does she do it?" exclaimed Brookes. "She been at it long?"

Ives laughed. "About three hours, or better."

"Good Lord!"

"There she comes now. I thought—"

The door opened and Astrid came in. She stretched out both hands and hurried forward.

"Brookes Parker! How delightful to see you again, and how good of you to come. Oh, but you look well."

He kissed both her hands, a little awkwardly. "I am well. And you?"

"Wonderful!"

"Good trip? How did the playing go?"

"Everything was fine. I played in Scandinavian

countries only, and of course the critics were kind. The real test comes next fall in Holland and Germany."

They regarded each other with the frank pleasure of old friends.

"How it is hot!" she continued, mopping her face with a large handkerchief. "I drink liters and liters of cold tea. You should see the glasses on the piano. I think I smoke now, please."

Brookes offered his case. "No, thank you. My own I like better. In that silver box."

She lit one of the huge cigarettes and blew a projectile of smoke straight before her.

Astrid was a large woman, very erect, with a sort of masculine freedom of movement. Masses of ashy blond hair were coiled smoothly about her head. Her eyes were her striking feature, very deep-set and intensely blue, with a curious trick of looking from time to time over one's head as though they sought wider horizons. Her beautifully modeled hands were calm. Everything about her spoke of poise and superb self-control. Her speech had the tang of foreign accent, and her voice, surprisingly clear and ringing, gave instant assurance of a fundamental sincerity.

"Must be a damned grind—that kind of practice I heard you do."

Astrid laughed. "It is not a—a damned grind, I am glad to say, Brookes."

"But do you really enjoy the kind of thing you were at?"

"Yes, I do. I find so many springs of strength in it. It is my mental stronghold. Surely you know. It gives me a power over myself to hold my thinking always clear. There can be no—how do you say?—no diffuseness. Everything controlled, no hurry, no compromise. A compromise becomes a ghost that haunts you later. Practice becomes a kind of—you laugh when I tell you—a kind of spiritual exercise. Always it is there—always it beckons—my piano."

"I think I get you."

"Get me?"

"I understand—quite. Practice is a kind of religion with you."

"What it represents—yes. The thing that practices, that works and creates at the keyboard; that—that is most closely and intimately myself. If that should be shaken—" She lifted her shoulders a little. "I don't know—then I should be unable to understand myself. You see—I wonder if I can say to you how—but to play one must be like a rock inside—so solid, so firm. One must be master. But if one is shaken sometimes, even a little, then the thing you build—what you say,

the structure?—yes, the structure shakes. You know, the public knows, the critic knows. One is not master.”

Brookes did not answer, and Ives looked a little startled. Astrid had spoken with an undercurrent of emotion that was unusual.

The Japanese butler appeared at the door.

“Mr. Ives, the telephone, please.”

He arose. “Excuse me—one minute.”

Astrid remained silent, continuing to blow lances of smoke straight before her.

Suddenly she spoke. “It steadies me to see you.”

“What? What do you mean? Has anything—”

She lifted her shoulders again.

“I don’t know—quite. Sometimes—little things—shadows, maybe. You know the sea, yes? You have sailed. You know how you look over the side of the boat, the sun is on the water; it is all surface—brilliant, reassuring. Then a little shadow of cloud passes and you look down deep—deep—so deep that you are dizzy with looking. Things move down there—great, swift, mysterious things that you did not know were there. Almost you cry out. Then the shadow goes; everything is bright again. You wonder if you dreamed, maybe; but never, never do you quite forget how deep and how dark it is there—just there below you, and what things wait.”



She passed her hand across her eyes and laughed her hearty laugh. "Ach, it is the heat, I am foolish. We shall sail some—soon, and I shall not look over the side of the boat to see shadows."

Brookes stared hard at his fingertips and assumed an air of almost professional detachment. Decidedly this was a new Astrid—a phase of her that was new to him. He was thinking hard and fast and was aware for the first time of his affections and interests being pulled two ways at once. All that he thought and felt about Ives and Astrid lay before him in an illuminated completeness like the revelation of a landscape in a flash of lightning. He knew now that he had often wondered subconsciously about the actual relation between the two, but he had never formulated the speculation. How much did Astrid care for Ives? What was she to Ives? He loved Ives deeply with something of the protectiveness a capable and practical man feels for a sensitive and dreaming friend. He had wanted to think that Ives had found in marriage all that he needed. He had wanted that very much for his friend. It was something of a surprise to realize that he had never stopped to wonder if Astrid found similar content and fulfillment. She had never appeared to need any one or anything. At times her absorption in music and her self-sufficiency seemed appalling. Just now he

was not so sure about that self-sufficiency, and he was amazed at the wave of tenderness and sympathy that flowed toward her.

Something inside of him was instantly on guard—curiously on guard against her and for her. He felt somehow a common part in her perturbation. What was disturbing her? Was it merely an intuition or did she know something of what he knew—or at least guessed? For Dora O'Day *had* talked.

## VI

He had been at Mabry's apartment one night when the little groups buzzed and tittered with the story as Dora O'Day had told it. He had heard it several times as it grew and expanded and took on specific detail under the careful ministrations of those expert gossips. He had observed Leslie and Ives on several occasions and saw that the story was not without foundation. Nevertheless he believed little of what he heard.

He had been genuinely surprised some time later when he heard a milder version of the tale related to Mabry herself. Mabry had laughed her sardonic, worldly laugh that so often had in it a touch of sensuality.

"Do her good," was her comment. "She needs some experience and I'd rather she got it from Ives than

some of these sleek-headed whipper-snappers hanging around. Leslie needs some of her superiority ideas taken out of her. Won't hurt her—do her good, I say. Won't do him any harm either. He's an artist—and you know what artists are."

Old harpy, Brookes thought, she is actually taking vicarious pleasure out of the situation.

He was shocked. Brookes, for all of his modernity, had a streak of puritanical upbringing left in his make-up which functioned particularly in what he conceived to be the responsibility of older people for younger ones. But he was doing Mabry something of an injustice. Mabry was sensual in her make-up, and she did more or less derive a reflected pleasure from the freedom of action she saw on every side. But she was naïve at the same time. She knew well enough of laxity and license, but they registered somehow as generalizations. She rather didn't believe in many concrete instances. Some old-fashioned quality lingered in her thinking which always made her stop short of complete cynicism. Ives, now, and Leslie: she would not or could not look squarely and unblinkingly at the obvious aspects of the story as it was told with its bald statements and unsubtle implications. She contrived to envelop the idea with a haze that blurred details and left her thinking of a sort of modern flirtation involving

nothing more serious than indiscretions of time and place—the whole seasoned with a little petting and kissing and soft talk. Modern—that's what it was. Fast young things in a new age, and she was not going to be the one to croak and be old-fashioned. Let 'em alone. Do 'em good. Leslie disconcerted her anyway at times with her steady, level-eyed look as though she were disapproving of her own aunt. She even achieved a tiny feeling of resentment about it. Leslie gloomed about these parties in a way that was maybe priggish, and she hated priggishness. It might teach her to be a bit more tolerant if she burned her fingers a little. Ives was a gentleman and a great artist. Yes, surely; do her good.

She laughed again her short, ribald laugh and congratulated herself on being up-to-date. Thank God she wasn't an old foggy like Sarah van Ruyn.

Had Brookes known exactly what Mabry thought he would in all probability have been no less shocked and certainly more incensed. This kind of unclear thinking, and slurring of morals was particularly abhorrent to his type of mind. He was not unwilling that every one should be free to think and do as he pleased, but he felt that an inescapable moral obligation lay in knowing what one was about.

Now as he sat remembering Mabry's attitude he

felt an accession of indignation, not on account of her laxness, but on account of her obtuseness.

"Damned old fool," he muttered.

"Pardon—you say?"

"Oh Lord, I had forgotten where I was. I was thinking. Excuse me."

"*Bien*. I hope you think not so foolishly as I talk. Come, I wish to show you my new harpsichord which Pleyel made for me in Paris. It is very beautiful. Come—it is downstairs in the drawing room. I could not hide so lovely a thing away in my music room."

"You are not giving up the piano in favor of the harpsichord, I hope."

"Never that! I am first of all pianiste. But it is very fascinating and the old music has a marvelous charm on it. It is not the same thing to hear Couperin, Rameau, and Scarlatti on the piano."

In the hall they met Ives.

"We go to show Brookes the harpsichord, Robert. I think I play a little for him."

They entered the drawing room and Brookes admired the black and vermillion elegance of Pleyel's fine re-creation.

"I have only this morning tuned it—you know one must be able to do this for oneself. It is not like a piano. Listen!"

The veiled tinkle fell from her fingers like misty gold. She improvised a little, testing the registers and displaying the wide variety of effects.

"Now I like to play a new-found work of Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach—not the great Bach, you know, Brookes, but the son. It is amazingly romantic for the period. The work is virtually unknown."

She played magnificently, but after the first interest in the harpsichord itself had passed, Brookes felt a decided dissatisfaction. The aristocratic nature of the instrument did not seem to lend itself to a personalized expression. The meticulous technique and the thin emotion of the music, if indeed it had any, moved in the conventionalized restraint of some antique dance in which all passion was submerged in a delicately ordered form. There was something incongruous about Astrid and her majestic freedom subdued to the mincing gait of the harpsichord. He felt the abnormality of the discipline she laid on her customary musical style. The uncompromising rigidity of this control irritated him and seemed somehow dangerous to the integrity of her personality. He smiled a little to himself at the seriousness of the observation. It was, after all, nothing but a sort of musical exercise for Astrid, already trained by years of discipline. He could not quite understand the new defensive position he found him-

self taking for her. That was something really incongruous, he reflected, as he glanced again at the athletic figure, the boldly modeled features, the large hands moving with the certainty of machines.

Nevertheless, at the moment she had about her an air of solitariness that touched him in some obscure way to a sympathy that was almost pity.

In all of the years he had known Astrid and Ives he had observed few signs of affection between them. They had appeared on the best of terms, but they had been quite like sister and brother, or comrades. He wondered now just how Platonic the relationship had become, and if the threat that hung in the air would wake her to some slumbering possessiveness or strike the discord of a disintegrating antagonism. He realized that his interest in the situation was acute. It was as though something in his mind had become tensely watchful and, he realized with a shattering dismay, actually hopeful of some sort of crisis.

He jerked his thought back to normality. His humor came to the rescue. What was a little triangle among friends nowadays?

Astrid swung now into the *Adagio*. A brooding shadow fell across the alertness of her face, quite as though she listened to the playing of some one else. The familiar expression of her eyes deepened. They

gazed far and far away. It was the look of a lone watcher, puzzled by the thing seen, and troubled.

Brookes listened, too, absorbed in the stately measures. He groped through the shimmering maze of unaccustomed sound. From the corner of his eye he caught sight of Ives sharply profiled against the mulberry brocade of a deep chair. He was startled by the tortured expression that ravaged the usual calm of his friend's face. Good heavens! Was it as serious as that? He darted a quick, anxious look at Astrid, fearful that she might see it also, but her head was bent over the keyboard listening seemingly for an answer to some question of overwhelming import in the low-voiced discourse of the reticent music.

Like many men whose lives are immersed in practical affairs, Brookes was capable of wild imaginings. There was drama in the air. This was like a prologue, he thought. Presently the curtain would go up. His Irish imagination felt the urge of obscure forces at work determining the rôles of the actors. Marcia, enigmatic and exciting; Astrid, brooding and solitary; Ives, sensitive and visionary; Mabry, mocking and realistic; and Leslie, glamorous in her triumphant youth. He saw himself also of the group; but he saw himself less clearly.

Astrid paused a moment after the *Adagio* and began



the last movement of the concerto. The music was gay, insouciant, and promptly cleared Brookes' mind of foreboding. His attention turned once more to her playing. He admired it; but he was more convinced than ever that he did not like the harpsichord—certainly not for Astrid with her striding imagination and masculine power.

Ives had not stirred throughout the lengthy composition but his brain was in a turmoil. That last sentence of Leslie's letter breaking through its gay tenor had brought him to an abrupt realization of the depths of his own feeling.

Astrid on the other side of the ocean was something very different from Astrid here. For that matter every one and everything was changed. He was a stranger to himself. . . . The scintillating music came to an end. Instantly the accustomed aspect of the world reasserted itself. Conventional comment on the music brought both Brookes and Ives back to themselves.

"You will lunch with us?" asked Astrid.

"I'm sorry, I can't. Engagement uptown." Brookes looked at his watch. "I'm late now. You're coming up to Ranley for a week-end right away. Ellen will telephone you. I'm off, now. Don't come down."

"Too bad. I thought you would stay. Robert and I are going to his studio this afternoon. I've not seen

what he has done while I was away. It is so good to see you, and there is much to talk about."

## VII

Astrid and Ives spent the afternoon in the Gramercy Park studio. Ives set the canvases about on the floor, tilting them in the proper light, and talking all the while. Astrid sat in her characteristic attitude, knees crossed, smoking her giant cigarettes, and making few comments. She had been unprepared for any change in the character of his work, and there was a change, a decided change. She had followed the slow evolution of his style from his first impressionistic manner and she felt that she understood the impulses behind every advance. She really knew him far better than he had ever supposed, and there was not a brush stroke in all of his painting up to the present group that she did not understand. She had always noted the influences of season, of places, and of the work of other painters. She had even been able to follow his depressions and elations. But this was different, and she was plainly puzzled.

He had produced an exceptional amount of work. The energy of the artistic impulse was everywhere evident, but a curious uncertainty was equally evident. The restless groping of his mind through the past

months, and the unsettling impact of New York's vast dynamic power on his sensitively balanced nature had had its effect. He had said once when some one asked him about painting New York that the city's electric activity seemed to him material for some sort of super-cinema yet to come, rather than for painting. The ceaseless motion and speed called for something more than the suggestion of movement possible in the static medium of conventional art. This new influence was plainly apparent, but that was not all. This was disorder, and a disorder that proceeded from within rather than from without. She found herself watching him and studying him instead of his pictures. He was like a little boy when he exhibited his work. His manner was touched with an odd timidity when he placed a new canvas in position, and an eager look came into his eyes. His face flushed and his words came with a rush. He aroused in Astrid a protective tenderness that she had not felt in a long time. He was once more the same young painter that had so seized her imagination years ago. Her eyes blurred a little, but he did not see it, and she continued her imperturbable smoking.

"It isn't quite right, Astrid. I know it. But you see there is something new. You do see it, don't you? I'm not satisfied though. There's something I must work out."

This was reassuring. He was always the exacting artist.

"It is extremely interesting, Robert. I like those three particularly. I feel a—how shall I say?—a tremendous release of energy in them, but they are most unrestful, and I am not sure that I get anything very definite. They are not your best."

"You feel that, too? You are right. I am glad you see it. There *is* something new, though. You see that, too, don't you?"

Again that eager look of a little boy waiting for reassurance. That he should seem a little pathetic just now stirred her unexpectedly. She must support him. There had been many times before when he had been in frenzies of despair. He had not known ever how uneasy she had been for him at such times for all that she knew of the ways of artists. She had lent richly of her own poise and security and he had always steadied again. But he must not, above all, see himself lost or groping. If he ever lost courage, it would be difficult to restore the self-reliant, self-critical painter who destroyed half of his work in his feverish search for the realization of his visions.

Astrid did not believe too much in her intuitions—not enough, really. She regarded those unsettling tremors that arose from her subconsciousness as a

manifestation of nerves or as shadows of something hardly more worthy than superstitions.

What she was sure of now—and this was more than intuition—was a new capacity in him for suffering, and she dreaded it for him. She was too sensible to believe overmuch in the familiar fiction of the power of pain to deepen and develop an artist. Hard knocks might be beneficial for a young man. Often the crudity of youth requires some sort of hewing and shaping. But she knew, too, the paralyzing effect of mental conflict on the mature, routined artist.

Astrid's sensitive understanding and delicacy in such matters was far greater than any one guessed. She had a tremendous respect for the sacredness of that mental battleground where each man must meet his peculiar foes. She would no more have thought of invading these privacies of the soul than she would have thought of revealing herself in such wise.

She wished with all her heart that she could meet whatever crises were to come for him, but she knew that all she could do would be to stand by, to wait, and above all to be silent.

## VIII

Two weeks passed before the week-end party assembled at Ranley. It was a gay and carefree-looking

group that sat down to tea one Friday afternoon on the terrace overlooking the river: Marcia Deering and her husband, Astrid, Ives, Brookes and his sister Ellen. Nevertheless four of those present were aware of an underlying tension. They knew themselves to be actors in a situation, but just what that situation was, what parts the others played, or what the inter-relationship was they did not know. This awareness of pending issues laid a weight on their spirits, and though the talk flowed light-heartedly enough, each sensed a certain brittleness in it. They dreaded any cessation of the chat—cessations which seemed constantly imminent—as though the briefest silence might reveal their thoughts or precipitate some sort of psychological crisis.

Ellen Parker seemed unconscious of anything unusual, though Brookes knew very well that her extraordinary social sensitiveness would speedily register the faintest waves of discord.

"But it is heavenly here!" exclaimed Astrid as her glance surveyed the perfect lawns, the fine old trees, and the severely clipped hedges.

"It is heavenly when there is some one here, but alone it is anything else," replied Ellen. "I really do not like the country. Only cows and children are suited to it. There is no time, and there are no events but eating and sleeping."

"You don't mean that, Ellen. I know you love this," said Brookes quietly.

"You only see me when I like it. You are away all week. You can't imagine what an eternity it is from Monday to Friday. I try to save up things and stretch them out to fill the days. I like events, and there are vast expanses of time in between such events as there are. I simply rattle around in a large emptiness, lashing myself from side to side like a tail. It's dreadful." She joined in the general laugh as she waved her hand at the landscape. "Oh, I know it's beautiful. But I could look at it and then go back to town and enjoy it for a month—from memory."

Astrid, who was never quite certain that she understood Ellen's bantering talk, looked a little puzzled. "But this wonderful space! The world seems so big here. There is room to move and think." She spread her arms as though she contemplated flight.

"The bigger the world seems, the smaller I feel, and become. I find myself incredibly interested in the personal affairs of the servants! I would eavesdrop if I weren't afraid they'd catch me! Yesterday Mrs. Bascomb called—you know, Marcia, Janice Bascomb's mother. I almost kissed her and I sat breathless while she told me how popular Janice is—but there are reasons. Mrs. Bascomb said eighteen boys came home

with her at five o'clock in the morning from the Ardsley dance. Sounds a little like a pussycat to me. 'Public service Bascomb' the boys call her!"

"Ellen!" remonstrated Brookes.

"I'm just telling you what the country does to me. It's frightful—and I'm a nice woman. Some tea, Mr. Deering? Brookes, Marcia's cup, please."

Every one laughed again and Ellen's bright-colored chatter went on. Ives regarded her with renewed admiration. He had long ago perceived the serious, intelligent woman underneath the giddy talk. She was, he thought, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her smooth black hair and flawless complexion, her brilliant black eyes and exquisite hands delighted his artist eyes. There was a radiance about her that emanated from superb physical well-being and from a restless, darting mentality.

He wondered why she had not married. Perhaps her magnificent self-sufficiency and mocking spirit was not the kind of combination that would attract many men. He thought she lacked her brother's warmth and sympathy. In this he was quite right. Ellen Parker's nature was essentially cold and this very coldness seemingly sharpened her perceptions. There were no hazes of sentiment in her vision. But if she lacked sympathy for the weaknesses of people, she was also incapable



of censure. She enjoyed observing the affairs of others, assorting their motives and fitting them into patterns, but she was too detached and too indifferent to feel much concern about them. Few things escaped her. It is probable that only Brookes knew her very well. She had no other confidants, but to him she talked freely. She was quite without malice, but equally without sympathy. She regarded the emotional mishaps of others as blunders of intelligence.

Ellen continued to talk. "Don't try to stop me, Brookes. I've been without an ear for a week and I must get this out of my system. Cigarettes?" She signaled the maid. "You won't be annoying me with interruptions if you smoke. Thank goodness, I don't smoke. I should never get anything said if I did. Eating is bad enough."

Brookes slumped in his chair with mock resignation. Astrid listened with an increasing delight. Ellen was genuinely amusing. Marcia perhaps appeared less comfortable. There was a faint air of politeness in her demeanor that was not perfectly friendly. Mr. Deering maintained his habitual silence. Ives looked covertly at him. He had been curious about Marcia's husband, and this man was a surprise. Mr. Deering had been absent each time he had visited Marcia. He could not

have said just what he had expected, or why he was surprised. Mr. Deering was tall and thin, with a crop of thick, unruly gray hair. Glasses magnified his beautiful gray eyes and gave them a sort of all-seeing look. He smoked long, thin cigars with an odd air of distaste as though he smoked in deference to some unwelcome convention. A subdued twinkle, perhaps also exaggerated by glasses, evidenced a keen appreciation of Ellen's flickering sentences. From time to time he glanced at Marcia with what appeared to be a look of secret amusement at her expense.

Ives found himself following this glance each time he observed it. What was it about Marcia, too, that was surprising in this new pattern? She was dimmed somehow. He was unable to determine whether it was Ellen's glitter or a certain sardonic something about Mr. Deering that did it.

Cramps her style, he thought unexpectedly in a recollected phrase of Leslie's picturesque slang, and felt immediate contrition for the thought.

He was brought back from his reverie by an unusual outbreak in the conversation in which even Mr. Deering joined. He caught only the last phrase of Ellen's sentence: "the right to be happy."

"We have no right to happiness. It is an egoist's de-

mand. Happiness is not necessarily important, and sometimes may not even be the best thing," declared Astrid solemnly.

"Good Lord, Astrid," expostulated Brookes. "What an impossible position to take! If we have no right to happiness, then nothing is worth bothering about. Maybe we haven't the right to be happy all the time. I'm not sure that I'd want to be—you know—for contrast and all that, but one must be happy a little, sometimes. Come now, Astrid, lighten the Scandinavian gloom and let us be happy once in a while."

Astrid laughed. "Always you make jokes. Maybe I do not make myself clear. I mean the conventional demand for happiness which means to most people freedom from every fettering law. There are more important ends to be served—a state, or an art, or a loyalty, or some other person's happiness."

"I know what *I* mean," said Ellen quickly, trying to steer the talk back to shallow channels. "I mean comfort, no worries, some money—"

"Lots of it, Ellen, dear, is what you mean," interrupted Brookes.

"—and nice friends who have enough leisure to spend the necessary summer periods in the country with me. If I couldn't have most of those things, I'd be a Red. I believe I am a Red anyway. What do you say, Mr.

Deering? You are a lawyer and you must know what I have a right to."

"He's a corporation lawyer. He'll tell you you have a right to what you can get."

"You are imposing a banker's point of view on the legal profession, Brookes. I'm afraid all of you have forgotten the philosophers. Just what is your definition of happiness?"

"Oh, God," groaned Brookes, rolling off his chair. "I knew it! There you are—all of you. Now you'll have to answer his questions. Marcia, speak up."

"To me happiness means freedom to find my own way."

"Well, my guess is you've got it. Let's stop this and walk—or play croquet. Then nobody will be happy."

"I'll not play croquet," declared Ellen. "It brings out the worst in human character. It can break up marriages and plunge blood brothers in hate. I believe croquet could destroy the Kingdom of Heaven. There's an example, now, of what the country does to you. We don't play tiddle-de-winks in town, but as soon as we come to the country some one wants to play croquet, or have a picnic! But if I must play, I'll have Brookes for a partner. He's loathesome as an opponent in anything."

"I think I'll stay here and finish my cigar if you don't mind," said Mr. Deering.

"I think it's sensible of you. Maybe I can stay with you. Who wants to play?"

"I cannot tell a lie. I'd like to talk to Mr. Deering," declared Ives.

"There; I knew it. All right, all right. Come on."

She marched off gayly, and the others followed.

## IX

Both men were silent for some time. Mr. Deering continued to smoke with a wry expression on his face, holding his cigar fastidiously with the tips of his fingers.

"Curious, isn't it," said Ives suddenly, "how much people talk now of happiness? It seems to me that no one used to mention it. I suppose," he went on ruminatingly, "it's because every one is taking stock nowadays of changing custom and changing morality, and asking if he has what is coming to him. What do you think of the present social upheavals?"

"Changing manners. That's all. I doubt if there is, or ever was, any morality as such. There is only custom and expediency."

"But the effect on the happiness of the present world seems to go deeper than questions of customs and manners."

"New customs always go hard. It's a matter of harmony. If beliefs are in harmony with your behavior, there isn't much trouble of spirit."

"But society—"

"That depends on how independent one is—or how discreet." Deering's tone was casual, and the cynicism of his words was tempered by a quiet amusement.

"Sounds as though you thought that conduct conforming to inner convictions might usually be in conflict with the existing order of things." Ives spoke slowly, feeling his way through a confusion of thought.

"Oh, Lord, yes. Practically always—if one is intelligent. Sex, for instance—and most of us are talking about sex nowadays, no matter what we seem to be discussing. Our whole make-up, every biological aspect of us, is in conflict with society. We mature years before the social and economic order makes marriage possible. We have all sorts of recently imposed conventions—recent as the age of man goes—double standards, monogamy, and what not. It's a wonder the jerry-built thing that is society stands at all."

"I can't say that the conventions seem to trouble much."

"Maybe not so much among the people you know intimately. But these things are amazingly sacred to the rank and file. Conventional morality, conventional re-

ligion, and all that, is a good deal like a book of etiquette. Very good thing for those who need a guide."

Ives laughed.

"Seems funnier, as a comparison, than it is," Deering went on. "D'you ever read a book of etiquette? No; of course not. But there isn't much in one that isn't violated, or transcended, by smart people who are supposed to be the standard. Just so with conventions and morality. Very little in the code that isn't transcended by those who are intelligent enough to know how the code happened, and what it means."

"And who know how to get safely around it."

"Exactly."

"It's a little bewildering, though. I had, I suppose, a conventional rearing, and since then I have been very busy painting. I've only half listened to all of the talk that went on around me. You know, old ideas take deeper root than one thinks. Some of them keep presenting themselves with all of the force and authority of austere deities—discipline, restraint, and the like. I continue to think of these as the van elements in the slow gains of civilization."

"You're partly right. But don't make the mistake of thinking of civilization as a slow, steady gain. It progresses in waves. There are retreats and advances.

Many advances are only of temporary value—untenable and undesirable positions.”

“But Christianity—or aspects of it? Elements of it that have made their appearances in earlier civilizations and earlier religions—”

“Not worth much as it stands, I think. Certain elements of it, as you say, are old as thought. It can be, and maybe is, rather a destructive force just now because it isn’t complete in its consideration of human nature and human needs. It made something unholy, or the church fathers did, of the natural instincts of man—the very instincts by which life survives; denies them place in dignity or beauty. It ignores the existence of the great power by which the vast waves of evolution have moved. The result is either ignorance, or hypocrisy. *It is the next great barrier to the free advance of the human spirit which must be broken.* If it is broken too soon, we’ll have a period of moral anarchy of some kind—a receding wave—maybe some centuries of it, but that’s nothing. It doesn’t count in the long-seeing way of looking at things. All of this so-called ‘modern’ stuff, ‘younger generation,’ and so forth, is the merest triviality. It’s nothing more than kicking some débris out of the way. There is a genuine striking toward some sort of balance and harmony between man, natural man, and his spiritual destiny.”



"The Greeks—" Ives paused.

"There's an enchanting distance between us and Greek civilization. I have an idea they weren't as sweet as they are written. There was a lot about them that was self-indulgent and childish and callous. Mind you, I don't think we can turn loose in every direction. There are some verities such as kindness and reciprocity. The old ideas, as you say, stick hard. But isn't it ridiculous, to come down to commonplace aspects of contemporary questions, to suppose that a man, changing radically, during the various phases of his life, should never be interested in more than one woman? Or that any intelligent woman, allowing for some fundamental differences of character deriving from her biological purpose, should love the same man with her forty-year-old brain who interested her when she was twenty?"

"Nevertheless—and I'm speaking from the standpoint of conventional society for the moment—some of these freedoms do violence to what you referred to as the verities."

"There's the ancient difficulty of fabricating the omelet and leaving the eggs intact. Undoubtedly a certain proportion of the unhappiness caused by this—er—variety in experience, comes also from our rather egotistic notions of our rights and our possessions."

"Still, it is hard for me to believe that the little irregularities—and I believe we are back to a discussion of familiar problems—we see on every side are motivated by such sublimated impulses. It isn't as though lofty biological aims were being served—"

"Not at all. Not at all. Man is a good deal more complicated than an animal. Everything would be pretty simple if he were not. Man has imagination—he has that winged spirit which must know his world as completely as possible. A dog is content with a crust and sleep. If there is one thing which has been sublimated, it is just this thing of sex. Its leverage is infinite. It's the utterest nonsense to expect the highly sensitive and intricate organism that is the human being to fetter the giant force of sex to utilitarian ends."

"Then you do advocate—"

"Nothing. I don't know the answers. No two people are alike."

Deering flipped his dead cigar away and drew another from his pocket. He eyed it distastefully, clipped the end, lighted it with exaggerated care and drew at it with an air of melancholy disappointment.

"I don't know what it is," Ives began almost timidly, "that has started me to thinking about all sorts of problems. Perhaps it is this young America. It seems

to me, as I think of such matters now—I don't know that I ever thought of them much before—that there were no questions just similar in Continental life. The society is old, settled. There are certain liberations, latitudes, but they are standardized. Frenchmen, for instance, seem born sophisticated. Everything over there seems set."

Deering regarded him with unwinking eyes that seemed to fill all of the space back of the magnifying lenses. Ives found that steady gaze a bit disconcerting. He did not speak again for several minutes.

"You know," he resumed, "America disturbs me—that is, New York does. It's all of America that I know. It is so young and so—so spendthrift of all of those qualities of life that I am accustomed to think of as being conserved. But I like it. I think maybe I feel it more keenly because I'm not accustomed to it as you are. It is terrifically alive, and it is a communicable kind of life. I get it, too." He spoke quietly as though he were thinking aloud.

"Nothing here seems settled. It gives one the feeling that every question is re-opened. I suppose I've been a sort of spectator. I've always been watching things—people, objects, color. And then something would awake in me and—well, I suppose that was what one would call an artistic impulse—then I painted." He felt a faint

surprise that he was talking like this to a man who, a few hours before, had been a total stranger.

"Now I seem to have been projected—catapulted into the midst of violent action. It is sort of—well—disorienting."

"What effect has it had on your painting?"

"No effect that I can see—that is, not directly."

Ives was aware of a slight concentrating of Deering's attention.

"I've heard that New York is a devourer of genius—bad place for creative work."

"I think that's nonsense. One can create anywhere if there is anything inside, provided, of course, there aren't actual physical hindrances."

"That would be my thought about it."

Ives did not speak again for a while. He felt a curious content in the presence of Deering, and an inexplicable comfort in his talk. He wondered what it was. Deering had said nothing original or startling, but he had somehow set the narrow limits of the present and its concerns in a relation to the vastness of life in a way that minified personal fevers and turmoils to negligible insignificance.

Ives felt, too, that Deering was in some fashion explaining Marcia, and maybe himself, perhaps defending her in the very words that held some kind of subtle

derision. It had taken Ives but a few minutes to see that violent forces acted between the two, and that Marcia, amazingly, was the one who moved, even planet-wise, about the major stability of Deering. It was astonishing. Without saying a word, he had by his mere presence reduced Marcia to something incredibly less important, as he had reduced the abstract powers of morality and custom to a flimsy formula by the simple device of sketching a larger time-scheme in relation to them. Ives considered him with a species of wonder, but with decreasing comfort. He was not sure that the power that could so quietly dissolve the barriers of convention before one's eyes might not as casually destroy other things less dispensable. How wrong Brookes had been when he spoke of Marcia's husband as not being in the picture! Ives with his sensitiveness to the hidden fundamentals of personality as well as to its subtle overtones perceived something quite different. He perceived Marcia as an intangibly, but securely tethered person. The discovery increased the puzzle of her personality but subtracted immeasurably from the glamour of her initial impressiveness.

A sense of immaturity and inexperience swept over Ives. He felt depressed. The afternoon sun flooded the lawn with misty gold. The glitter faded from the river. Deering slumped deeper in his chair and seemed

lost in his own musings. Thoughts of Leslie invaded him with a profound disquiet that leagued itself with that sense of ineffectiveness that occupied him. In the presence of Deering he felt embarrassed. Nevertheless he knew that Leslie had become a real issue and that the complications involved could not be dispersed by plausible generalizations. She was already wound into his life. He felt that Brookes, or Deering, would not consider it a problem to be taken seriously. Any one of them would dismiss it as a flirtation, or a fancy, permissible enough—even understandable as such. But he was aware already of sharp clashes in his established scheme of loyalties. He was unable to conceive of himself drifting in and out of an affair as one might stroll through the airy portals of a pavilion. Already he knew himself to be the battle-ground of conflicts whose issues must be catastrophic to something within himself.

He was not so sure of conventional mishaps. Astrid, Leslie—they possessed, each of them, some sort of security that he did not. His depression sank into a feeling of helplessness and isolation. The troubled current of his thoughts turned backward. A little more than a year ago he had been in Auvergne. From the viewpoint of the present he invested the time and place with a supernatural peace. He saw himself there as a

shadowy unreality. Was he really like that a year ago? Had he ever been like that? The nostalgia that seized him was the more acute because interlaced with a feeling of disloyalty to Leslie and the thing he knew he had become to her. A strange tenderness, half love for the woman she had become, half pity for the child she still was, moved him with an almost convulsive intensity. He felt himself for the moment more of her world than of the world of this group of people about him. They were so complete, each one in himself, seemingly so adjusted, moving serenely on undeviating orbits. They had graduated from the school of emotional experience—the very school he was just now entering. He saw them passing smoothly through the technique of living with an easy mastery of problems each one of which was for him a crisis of danger. Fool that he was! Had he lived and watched and listened and read for nothing? Had he been nothing more than a medium through which an artistic urge had transmitted itself, leaving the instrument untouched? A rage against the circumstances of his life arose suddenly in him. He wanted to run away from this self-contained, beautifully self-active society. He was not of it. There was no understanding of him in it, and no mercy for him. Worst of all, no one here needed him. They were, he said again to himself, so complete. Leslie, on the

other hand, for all of her apparent insolence and repelling manner, was a bewildered soul with a wistful something underneath that was part loneliness and part timidity. He had seen her without her bright, hard mask. She reached out to him from her disordered world in which there seemed no secure anchorages. That had its own appeal.

It was all well enough to talk as they did—all of them, Deering included—and metaphorically wave the world of convention aside. It was only a gesture. This house, the whole world represented here, was allied by thousands of bonds to an orthodoxy. Damn them all for their high, free talk! They did not live by it. They wouldn't try. They would smother in themselves any such feeling as he had now as they would crush any one of their number who tried to live by it. A cooler corner of his brain warned him that this indignation was childish. He was only trying to rationalize his wishes, or to work up an imaginary case against his friends in order to set himself in a more courageous or picturesque light. But the wave of protest rushed in again. . . . After all it was natural, justifiable, right: he was acting on the impulse and urge that moved the world. What difference did it make that it did not happen to fit into the prearranged convention of his existence? Was he in any sense a free agent, or



was he not? Good God, he was living the only life he had to live and a large part of it was gone, and what was there to show for it? His career, his work? What an artificial structure it looked to be at this moment—spun out of his imagination, cerebrated, but with no profound attachment to the deeps of himself as a sentient human being. He hadn't begun to paint yet. What he had done was good, yes, but there was something essential of himself that was not, never had been, in it. What kind of a limbo had he been living in, anyway? People—the world—spoke of him as an important painter, an arrived artist. Other men envied him. Exhibitions, medals, decorations, elections to this and that society. It all had the appearance of a thoughtful and full life. But it had not been. That central chamber of his being, instead of being peopled with the creations of a genuinely fruitful existence, was empty. The mid-most pages of the years were unwritten. It had been chance, the unmaleficent play of chance. The way of a career had been easy because of money, good connections, an intelligent family, and talent. He was not ungrateful for these things. He had seen too many talents smothered by crude material needs. He had been free to dream and to allow his passion for painting full sway. It had been good to have it so, and the work was good, too. He knew that. Only the work of

these last months: that was disordered. He had painted with an actual fury. The ordered faculties that always sat so coolly in judgment had been confused by these intrusions of so many new emotions. This damned New York! Maybe Deering was right. Maybe it was a devourer of the creative artist. No, that was all poppycock. It was much simpler than that. Maybe the whole disturbance could be boiled down to purely physiological causations. People were always talking smirkily about some of their middle-aged acquaintances and their Indian Summer amours. It made him a little sick. There was Jules Lenoir whom he had seen at Tours last year with a sort of brat in tow. But Jules was a man of steel. He could laugh his great laughs with his red voluptuous mouth showing in his prodigious beard, and go on undisturbed by the most terrific debaucheries. Jules with his unending strings of mistresses—he had heard of one who committed suicide when she was dropped—nothing ever disturbed his painting. He ate, drank and loved like a veritable Gargantua, and all the while his flower-like pastels blossomed sweetly under the precise manipulations of his magical fingers. One was either an artist or one was not. And yet there were men who were geared like delicate machines—organizations so sensitive that the faintest tremors shook them like a seismograph.

He had a disquieting recollection of a novel by Paul Bourget that he had read some years ago. *Le Démon de Midi*—yes, that was it. But a very different situation. Politics, or banking—such careers were sensitive things. Anyway, it was the quality of his work he was thinking about now. Those canvases he had shown to Astrid; he must destroy a lot of them.

He knew how he wanted to paint. There were some ideas he would go to work on at once.

The rapid pictorial shuttling of his mind began—shifting, assorting, arranging, coloring. There was no diminution of those seeing and inventive faculties that had chained him to his easel so many years. It was good to feel that fury in his brain—to see those glowing, daring images imperative of paint. But he remembered also in this exultant moment paralyzing hours when he could not touch a brush. It was because he was unhappy—unhappy in a new way. He wanted something, desperately, and that something was Leslie. The want of her tingled along his nerves no less imperiously than the familiar demon of the painting fever.

All at once the nebulous feelings of the past months concentrated and clarified. Circling uncertainties came to rest. Leslie slipped into a place in his mind and heart as into a prepared niche and with a finality that

cleared his brain of tormenting excitements. Let the crash come, if it must!

He was glad that this moment had come to pass while she was away. It was of himself that it came. His decision took strength from that knowledge.

X

The croquet party was returning. Ives and Deering arose.

"I am a shattered woman," declared Ellen, sinking into a chair. "There is no more wicked and devastating game in the world. There should be a set of rigid conventions devised for croquet—like bridge—to keep people from revealing the demons in them. What I know about these people! Their baseness, and guile! Would you believe that Astrid is Hedda Gabler in disguise? If Hedda Gabler had played croquet, she would have played as Astrid does. Such malice, and cunning! I have no faith left, and no illusions. My own brother—after all I had to play against him. Marcia was my alleged partner."

She fanned herself with her handkerchief and her black eyes sparkled with indignation. "Tomorrow it shall be golf. There's a game! You can take good, healthy whangs at the ball. None of this subtle spite work on your opponent's game."

"Ellen is a soloist. She didn't appreciate my efforts to take her along with me. Such ingratitude is—" Marcia sought vainly for adequate comparison.

"Sharper than a serpent's tooth," Brookes aided.

"Never mind, dinner will heal my lacerated spirit. By the way, the Elsons are coming over. I must run now and be housewifely for a bit. Dinner is at eight."

"I'm going in, too," said Deering. "I've a little work to do."

"And I have to run down to the village. Any letters to go—anybody? Who wants to go with me?" Brookes looked at Astrid.

"I'd love to if I may. Will I have time to dress when we come back?" Astrid spoke quickly.

"We won't be gone half an hour. Marcia? Robert?"

"Not I. I'm going to walk a bit, if Mrs. Deering will come with me."

Ives and Marcia turned toward the river.

## XI

"Astrid," said Brookes during dinner, "I hope you are going to feel like playing some while you are here. It does me a lot of good to hear you. When you do Brahms or Beethoven I seem to get a new perspective. Troubling things that seemed important fade out and

recede and seem a good deal less important. But don't play unless you want to."

"Bless your heart, Brookes, I would love to. I have been thinking this afternoon that I wanted to play." She laughed a little, half deprecatingly. "You know the truth is, I am always ready to play. Oh, but—Ellen, I'm going to be impolite—I looked into the drawing room and saw that huge, decorated piano and I was discouraged. Pianos that look like that seldom sound well."

"Oh, that! That's furniture, not a piano. There's a good one in the north room next the library. It's a better room, too."

"So? I am relieved. And I could have saved my manners! But I know those pianos in, what you call them?—art cases."

"It will be wonderful—you will play? Otherwise we'll gossip, or discuss happiness, or worse, I might have to face my friend brother across a bridge table."

"I thought you had gossiped yourself out, Ellen," Brookes replied, "before tea. If you don't see more people than you say you do, how do you know what's going on? Mrs. Willis' Paris divorce; Tom Sherry's affair with Trudy Ruchers at the Lido—how do you do it? That I should have such a sister!"

"But you were interested. We're always interested in the successes of others. But I don't hear much, really. Just fragments here and there. Two and two nearly always make four, you know."

"By the way, Ellen, you know Evelyn Pell, don't you?" asked Mrs. Elson. "Have you heard that she is married again? A young Italian—in Rome last week."

"My dear, you don't mean it? Well, I knew she would. She's been going around with him for three months. You know, Marcia, she was married to that monument of gloom, old Dombey Pell. I don't know how she lived with him at all. I wonder if Leslie—but then Leslie doesn't get on with either of them. She's going it alone."

"I don't know how much alone," Mrs. Elson's voice purred a little, "but I've heard a good deal about the speed. She lives just around the corner from Mabry Hamerick, supposedly under the far-reaching shadow of Mabry's chaperonage. Can you picture Mabry chaperoning at either long or short range? It almost turns me back to old-fashioned ideas about hearth and home, children of divorce, and all that. Leslie runs with those Fielding twins and Fulton Griggs, and Aley James and that crowd. I think it's terrible."

"And the Fieldings live at home with Mamma and Papa, remember." Brookes was apparently concen-

trated on the asparagus. "Didn't I read somewhere that Swinburne, or somebody, ate asparagus beautifully? I wonder how he did it. Think of such an art being lost to humanity. And Leslie couldn't make the Fieldings' time if she tried."

"I didn't know you knew Leslie Pell. Are you going in for flappers?"

"I'm like you, Ellen, I know everything."

"Leslie Pell is a very unusual girl," Marcia remarked quietly. "My two nephews characterize her as 'Ritzy,' and there is no higher praise from mortal lips. The truth is she is very much like her father. Both of them are so strong-willed, so hard-headed, that they can't make headway together. But Dombey Pell knows pretty well what is going on and he has a covert admiration for her spunk."

"Leslie Pell belongs to the straight-shooting type of the so-called younger generation—a generation that is older than we are by some centuries." Mr. Elson, who had also been devoting himself to the intricacies of the asparagus, apparently gave it up for the greater interest of the conversation.

"You, too, brute," exclaimed Mrs. Elson. "All of these men know her, and champion her. *That's* a recommendation."



"All of you know her, too, and don't champion her; and *that's* a recommendation."

"Venomous reptile!" his wife retorted.

Under the flicker of gay talk Ives felt a freezing stillness holding him as in a vise. Was it imagination that both Brookes and Marcia were also aware of it and that their instant rallies were attempts to interlace those threatening lacunae with strands of commonplace? Surely it was his imagination that Ellen seemed instantly alert and that the scintillating virtuosity of her talk spun diverting light across the sudden chasms.

What imbecility, he fumed, to feel like this. What of it? What if every one knew, as every one might eventually know? A brief reassurance staggered vainly against the onrush of feeling that surged violently from the deeps. This was the hurricane—the counterpart of that hurricane from the Caribbean that he had recalled one spring day while he stood at his studio window in Gramercy Park. Hurricanes, he reflected, arose from natural causes. They were of things as they are—inevitable, inescapable.

## XII

The conversation regained safety in the shadowy securities of the north room to which Ellen led them.

Coffee was served and presently the broken chat of the dinner table frayed out to silence. Astrid was already running inquiring fingers over the keys of the piano which stood boldly out in the generous spaces of the big room.

A moment and she swung into the opening measures of a Brahms Sonata. The music soared, building its arches of aspiration and exultation—an edifice in which brooded the spirit of an unalterable calm.

Brookes had seated himself facing Astrid. A cone of light from a heavily shaded lamp cut across the keyboard and cast a softened reflection up to her face. From his chair he could see only her swaying head as she yielded to the movement of the music. Her characteristic far-seeing look intensified as though somewhere in remote reaches of vision she saw the sounds she created come to life and action.

Her playing took strange hold on him, but it was not the inherent emotion of the music; it was the stark disclosure of the essential personality of the woman. The grave measures were creating for him not the serious mood of the music but a fusion of all the varied elements and qualities he had long known as the woman Astrid Borg. He had often heard her play, but tonight there was aroused in him a new consideration of her. He shaded his eyes with his hand as he

studied her, turning his gaze from time to time to Ives, whose face was caught sharply in a shaft of light from the hall. Brookes experienced a strange tug at his heart. He loved Ives, perhaps because Ives was so essentially much that he himself was potentially. With it went a protective feeling for the sensitive nature that he knew held such capacities for suffering and was now in such danger of it. Astrid—his glance returned to her—Astrid was like a rock, and yet she had spoken just a few days before of premonitions that shook her. Damn Leslie Pell, anyway. He repented instantly. This sort of thing—the situation that seemed imminent—came from within. No one person could be blamed for it. It was in the cards, so to speak. And people talked so glibly, so blithely of such matters. Affairs—they were common as dinner parties. He had seen many of them. But just here—these dearly loved friends—this was different. Different because of the richly endowed natures involved. Leslie . . . he knew a good deal about Leslie by this time. He knew something of the violence and intensity that were masked by her apparent composure. She, too . . . Lord, what a devilish snarl!

In the midst of these jerky reflections he had become subconsciously aware of Marcia's unguarded look. She was looking at Ives: Brookes caught his

breath in astonishment and looked away. He began to wonder if he was becoming a little queer. Astrid, Ives, Leslie, Marcia . . . Astrid was playing the return of the slow movement—the melting phrases moving softly as moonlight. There was such a caressing gentleness, such pitying tenderness, in her playing. What was she thinking? Why was there such a tone of resignation and sadness?—Nonsense . . . He brought himself back decisively. This was Brahms . . . all of this was written by a great composer and was being played by a great pianist, and he was foolishly engaged in trying to address it to something that did not as yet, and might never, exist. But he was too honest, and too acutely aware of all that went on in himself, not to know that at this minute he was more concerned for the fate and happiness of the woman at the piano than for the fate of any one else. All that he had been thinking swirled again at vertiginous speed through his head. He felt for an instant as though he were being drawn down the smooth black walls of a watery vortex. A fleeting recollection of a silly childhood game came back to him—what was the name of it? He had forgotten . . . oh, yes—it was “Going to Jerusalem”! He could have shouted with wild, ironic laughter, *Going to Jerusalem! Going to Jerusalem!*

He pressed both hands hard against his eyes to shut

out a fierce illumination—the face of his friend Ives cut for the moment in a wondering conflict of dream and bitterness; the proud face of Marcia surprised in the instant of self-revelation; the face of Astrid Borg.

Beyond them all the immobile visage of Deering—Deering with his magnified eyes behind glittering glasses—Deering, detached and sardonic—Deering smoking with his usual air of disrelish deepened to downright aversion. Once more Brookes felt that mounting threat of laughter catching his throat. The call of the forgotten game sounded in his ears like a demoniac taunt—*Going to Jerusalem! Going to Jerusalem!*

All of this time Ives was spinning on the carousel of memory—now become a maddening wheel of torture. Astrid's playing, always a potent evocation, smote him with a poignancy quite unexpected. He had never dwelt much on memories. He had been too busy with the shifting pageant of the present. He had been almost unaware of those serried experiences—shining ranks of days and days, each with a lance pointed now straight at his heart.

During the past weeks he had been attempting some sort of recapitulation of his life with Astrid, some sort of summation of their relationship. He had even contrived an undercurrent of resentment, but just what it

was based on was not perfectly clear. Under the softening spell of the music the careful articulation of reasoning gave way to the pervasive insinuations of feeling. He saw himself bound to Astrid by thousands and thousands of items of common experience. They had known the same people, seen the same places, exchanged countless thoughts and ideas, laughed at the same absurdities. Even if one could not say that he was bound to her by these multitudinous strands, it must be admitted that these joint experiences made the pattern of his life over a number of years. She was a central figure in that pattern. They were woven together in it, inseparably, inextricably. Already the strain of change was like a sort of dismemberment. Her unawareness of his feeling increased the stress acutely.

The aspects of their life together seemed as settled and permanent as the features of a landscape. Across the serenity of this landscape moved the bright, cruel presence of Leslie Pell, but he could not bring himself to wish that she had not appeared. She was the instant anodyne of her own cruelty.

A short time ago, on the terrace outside, he had come to a decision. All that he felt—the way he felt—had been so clear at that moment. Now it was less so.

Surely he loved the grave, majestic woman who was playing so magnificently. This warmth, this tenderness,

this wish to save her from defeat. Yes, that was it! So often through the years as he had watched her patient perseverance, her gradual growth in greatness, he had said to himself that she must not know defeat. He had not meant material defeat or artistic defeat; he had meant that spiritual defeat that destroys all other victories. Now, more than ever, he was sure that he must, somehow, stand between her and the very threat of which he himself was the author. But did that mean the renunciation of Leslie, a renunciation that, he perfectly knew, would leave him utterly bereft, and which would deal treacherously and crushingly with Leslie as well? That, too, was unthinkable.

But could one travel two roads at once? His brain wearied with the endlessly repeated and obviously unanswerable questions.

He tried to force the problem back to some aspect of the commonplace. He told himself over and over again that this was not a new or cataclysmic experience. Love affairs! Weren't they everyday occurrences? Need they be attended by such extremities as he feared? But he knew that there were attendant phases of this that struck deeper than mere love affairs usually do. Things that were essentially himself, essentially Astrid, essentially Leslie, were involved—deep incarnations of char-

acter which were perhaps for each of them the sum of destiny.

## XIII

Astrid finished the sonata and sat for a moment. No one spoke. Presently she began again and played uninterruptedly through several smaller pieces of Brahms. A Capriccio, several Intermezzi, and a rhapsody. The last somber chords died away. Still no one spoke.

"You must be tired. It is too much, yes?"

"Oh, please, Astrid—if *you* are not tired." Ellen's voice dropped a little in pitch to a note of warmth unusual with her.

"Do you feel like playing some Debussy?" Marcia asked.

"But certainly. The very night is like Debussy. *La terrasse des audiences au clair de lune*. I have never played a group of the night pieces together. Shall I—for fun? *La lune descend sur le temple qui fut*, first."

## XIV

The enchanting measures began. What a different world this was that Debussy summoned by his sensitive magic! Witching nights, parterred gardens, fountains, the light passage of delicate personages in pursuit of fastidious pleasures, the discreet celebrations of



fragile ecstasies, whispers, echoes . . . a region of pagan pleasures rendered exquisite by moonlit prospects.

Ives felt himself yield to the subtle urge of the music. In it eternal Pan spoke his immemorial messages to the unchanging heart of man . . . whispers, echoes, ecstasies . . .

## xv

A moment ago he had been beset by all of the abominable obstacles of convention. He abhorred the thought of subterfuges, concealments. Now these, too, vanished with deeper inhibitions. He knew himself free as those mystical beings of the music. Nothing in all the world could deny Leslie to him. He would lie, if necessary, to the uttermost. He would save what could be saved for every one. He would attempt the impossible.

He even felt some sort of logic in the situation. He was in love with two women—that was clear. It appeared, in this strange world he was in for the moment, to be a tenable position. He understood himself perfectly. Perhaps no one else would—Brookes, maybe—but even that didn't matter too much. In the tortuous duality of nature that had come into being within him there appeared a whole new set of laws, of logic, of

convention, new right and wrong, monstrous but inevitable—monstrous as nature itself in many of its unusual manifestations, and as inevitable and inescapable in its working. It was so. It was this way. He was this thing—this combination of things—which he was now experiencing. He must act in accordance with them.

Still the music wove its sorceries . . . The air was hushed in expectation, tense, moon-crazed. Figures moved in the ambiguous light. Obscurities beckoned. From far away sounded the fluting of immortal Pan . . .

## XVI

Would any one understand? Could any one possibly understand? He was one thing to Astrid—unalterably something made in the alembic of long, quiet years; he was another thing to Leslie—suddenly, violently—something fused in the flame of a feeling that was no less perfect. Was any of this reducible to the terms of ordinary language? Language seemed all at once debased and common. It stripped emotion of every strange bloom. To say this . . . a wife in one house, a mistress in another! Was this to be made one of the world's legion of cheap amours? Must every subtle complexity of human adjustment be formulated in the crass and elementary terms of common understanding?

But *some one* must see, and understand. Brookes, conceivably.

A desolate loneliness succeeded swiftly to his mood of sensuous exaltation.

He was knowing, as he was to know more and more, the fixed isolation of the human soul. He had been living pleasantly in a supposed freedom, only to discover that he was inexorably walled in with his own conception of himself.

Was he strong enough to act on this certain knowledge of self with no other than his own approbation? A fleeting recollection of Lenoir, with his great red laugh, came back again. How casually he had judged, and placed the man! What did he know of Lenoir? Doubtless far less than Lenoir knew of him. Lenoir, brutal and sensitive—Lenoir seemed to Ives to belong to some adult world whose ways were directed by exigencies unknown to him. He knew himself to be a very child at life. A great stream of light seemed to flow back through the years illuminating events and incidents with new and startling meanings.

## XVII

The music over, Ellen chanted the charms of the sunken garden by moonlight. Presently Brookes and

Astrid were left alone. She crushed a half-finished cigarette in a tray.

"Don't you wish to go, too, Brookes?"

"Presently." He made no move to rise from his chair, and she seated herself again at the piano, improvising softly.

"Astrid!"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

"What—with me? Nothing, Brookes. Why?"

He arose and rested his arms on the piano.

"Look at me."

Her fingers hesitated on the keys as she raised her eyes. Immediately she looked back again at her fingers and continued the vague, restless playing.

"Why do you ask?"

"Why don't you answer?"

"There is nothing—I don't know, Brookes. Why do you ask? *Is* there something? You tell me."

"The other day, in town, you spoke of being uneasy—premonitions, intuitions—something."

She shrugged. "Oh, that—"

"Your playing tonight was—" He paused.

"What was in my playing? Certainly, Brookes, nothing there."

"No, no, of course not. But what your fingers are

saying now. You are asking questions. What are they?"

She ceased playing abruptly.

"There. You see?" he said quietly.

"I—I don't know what you mean."

"Astrid, I have known you for a good long time. I know you almost as well as I know Robert—or as well as I think I know him."

A quick glance noted the amendment.

"Well—and then?"

"Just now I don't think I know you so well."

"Oh, I am sorry. I like to think you do know me—very well."

"You are willing that I should?"

"Most certainly. But what is all of this—?"

"Only that something seems to be wrong somewhere and I thought you might want to tell me what it is."

"And something, my dear friend, is troubling you at this minute. Also, you see, I know you most well. What is it?"

He did not answer for a moment, and then he spoke slowly. "I don't know."

"Then there is something?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry, Brookes, if there is any trouble for you in the world. You seem to me to be most good. There should be nothing for you."

"And I should be sorrier than I can say if there should ever be unhappiness for you. Being good doesn't prevent things from happening to one."

"You are being mysterious. You increase my alarms."

"Increase?"

"I mean you—you seem to make foundation to something that was all of the air—of nothing. You make it something. Perhaps we make something of nothing by speaking."

She began playing again.

"Brookes, you will excuse me for an impertinence, but we are old friends, very good friends, and we have been very frank; not so?"

"Certainly."

"You have never married. I have wondered sometimes. Have you never loved any one? Don't answer if you don't wish to."

"Oh, I've had ideas sometimes. Nothing serious. There's no worm at the heart of the rose, if that's what you mean. And you?"

"I?"

He saw the quick flush and the hurt look. "Oh, good Lord, forgive me, Astrid. It was a damn fool question. I wasn't thinking."

"It was an unnecessary question."

"I'm sorry. Please—"

"It was nothing. Only you say you know me well!"

"I spoke stupidly. Only—don't mind if I'm blunt—being married doesn't always mean that one has been, or is, profoundly in love."

"I think for me that staying married would mean I love—I think so."

"So many feelings make up love, and pass for it. The maternal instinct—"

Astrid laughed outright and began spinning arpeggios with one hand. "Are you trying to argue me out of my established affections?" She sobered a little and the flying arpeggios slowed as she observed the red that crept across his face.

"I guess we're just talking, Astrid. How about a high-ball?"

"I'd love it."

"Good!"

He returned in a moment from the adjoining room with the glasses. Astrid lifted hers.

"*Skaal!*"

"Looking at you!" He smiled. Their talk ran easily on the smooth rails of commonplace.

## XVIII

Ellen sat in front of her dressing table while her maid brushed her hair. She gave her nails a few aim-

less strokes with a buffer as the braids were being finished.

"Will you knock at Mr. Parker's door and ask him to come here, please?"

"Yes, madame."

Ellen slipped into a wistaria and silver negligee, and waited. It was an old custom, this bedtime talk with her brother. At such times she dropped all of her superficialities. Brookes always thought of her as she was in these moments of intimacy. He was deeply devoted to her and had a genuine respect for her keen judgment and fundamental common sense. She was no less devoted to him.

He came in gayly, seized her two braids and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Well, old girl, how's everything, really? Haven't had a word with you. Any special news of any kind?"

"No, none at all. Nice party, isn't it?"

"Great!"

They talked in brief sentences. Many words were unnecessary between them. Ellen curled up on a chaise longue and made elaborate upholsteries of many lacy pillows. Brookes clasped his hands behind his head and stretched his legs.

"Deering's a strange chap, isn't he?"

"Very."

"Like him, Ellen? I mean—really?"



"Very much."

"Mind if I smoke in here?"

"Matches on the mantel, Brookes."

He selected a cigar from his case and clipped the end.

"Brookes, I wish you'd tell me something."

He stared at her. "I didn't know I'd left anything untold. What is it?"

"Have you ever loved any one?—I mean, you know, been in love, seriously?"

"Well, for—Ellen, have you been this way long?"

"I'm serious, Brookes."

"So am I. Don't you think you would have known it? You've known everything else all these years."

"But it stands to reason there must have been some one. A man doesn't go through life—"

"Well, there was Marion Hill, and Prudence Alston, and Alice Huguelet, and—"

"Nonsense!"

"I agree with you."

"You know I always had an idea that maybe there was something, or could be something, somehow—"

"Start all over, Ellen."

"—between you and Marcia Deering." Her bright black eyes were fixed on his face.

"You never thought anything of the sort. Your deepest and most guileful ways are as transparent as

the shams of an opossum. What are you getting at?"

"I'm *at* it now. Things like that do happen, you know."

"Isn't Marcia—er—interested in her lawful, wedded husband in some sort of way?"

"In some sort of way, yes. She's not in love with him. She's fascinated, though, by him. What do you know about Leslie Pell?"

"Oho! That's it. Why didn't you come out with it at first? What do I know about her? What do you mean?"

"I mean—what do you know about Leslie Pell?"

"Now, let me see. She is the daughter of Dombey Pell, resident of Lenox at present. Age, about nineteen or twenty—"

"Don't be silly. When her name was mentioned at dinner something happened in the air. I don't know what it was, but I think you do, and that's what I'm asking. All of you seemed to know; Marcia, Mr. Deering—and Robert, too."

"What were we saying about her?"

She ignored this. "Who's interested in Leslie Pell?"

"Who's interested in her?"

"Repeating one's questions, Brookes, is the most antiquated form of stalling. Are *you*?"

"Am I what! Interested, or stalling?"

She gave an exasperated exclamation. "Are you interested in Leslie Pell?"

"Yes."

"In love with her?"

"No."

"Somebody is, and somebody you know, and, I think, somebody in this house, or closely connected with some one here. Just a minute. You say it isn't you, though it might be easily enough. I know it couldn't be Deering. Is it Robert?"

"Really, Ellen—"

She went on as though talking to herself. "It's funny how things fit together. He went to Mabry Hamerick's a good many times last winter. He would have met her there. Then I saw him with her once in Madison Square, and his studio is in Gramercy. And once I heard Lucy De Vinne say that Madame Borg had better come home to her husband. Lucy is a cat, and she's a friend of that cheap opera singer, the O'Day creature who has been tagging Mabry all winter, and that O'Day would know and would tell Lucy—"

"Ellen, this is outrageous. You're being as bad as Dora O'Day."

"Is her name Dora? So it is Robert. That's terrible. How far has it gone, Brookes?"

"I have never known you to be so ridiculous in all your life. How far has what gone?"

"There you're repeating my question. I'll go back to the beginning now. What do you know about Leslie Pell?"

"Nothing."

"What do you know about Robert Ives?"

"Just what I've always known."

"Are they in love with each other?"

"Ellen, for Heaven's sake—"

"So? They are. Well, I think that's terrible—for Astrid."

Brookes surrendered. "It seems to me it may be pretty terrible for every one."

"Oh, I don't know. It won't hurt Leslie. It will do something to Robert, I don't know what. You know, Brookes, great artist that he is, and charming man and all, I don't believe he's ever been—well, I don't know how to say it exactly; but did you ever think when you looked at his pictures that maybe he doesn't see the real world at all? Maybe he never has, and maybe he never has really seen people, and maybe—" she was talking to herself again, "maybe Leslie Pell woke him up to one or two realities."

"I think you are insane, possibly harmless, but insane."

"And Astrid—well, that's different. She'll be awfully shaken if she finds it out, and she will, if she doesn't know it already."

"Ellen, there hasn't been much of anything to know. I think they've just been seeing each other a bit more than—"

"Well, there'll be more. Put two such compounds near each other as Robert and Leslie and there'll be more—much more."

"What kind of a compound do you think Robert is?"

"Like all men, only more so. Sensitive to beauty, sensuous by nature, and dependent on women. He's been living on paint all of his life—and Astrid on music. I've always wondered when it would come. I thought that Russian painter girl would set things going that summer we saw them at Quimper, but he thought she was an artist and forgot to notice that she was a girl."

"It's a damn pity. Astrid and Robert have been such good friends. I don't see why in thunder Leslie couldn't pick on some one else."

"Do you suppose she did all of the picking?"

"She met him at Mabry's last winter at a party. They went off together and stayed all night at his studio."

Ellen emitted a long whistle. "Still, that doesn't say *she* began it." She sat up and readjusted her pillows.

"Well," she continued, "I should never have guessed that Robert would be what Lucy calls 'a fast worker.'"

"Don't be vulgar, Ellen."

"You're awfully touchy about it all. Aren't jealous, are you?"

"Ellen!"

"How well do you know Leslie?"

"Pretty well. I made a point of getting acquainted with her as soon as I knew about it. She's clever."

"Self-centered?"

"No, she isn't. She's a lot older than her years—"

"All of those youngsters are."

"—perfectly able to take care of herself if she wants to. Generous, selfish, warm, cold—"

"You're describing anybody."

"Well—at times I've thought she had a lot of heart and sensibility, and again she seems to be all a ruthless sort of modern intellect, logical as the devil, and hard. She isn't underhanded—too indifferent for that—but she's secretive. One thing I am sure of, she is absolutely and genuinely in love with Robert."

"Oh, that's bad!"

"—and if he wants her to she'll go to hell and through it with him—or for him."

"Have you talked to her about him?"

"Not the way you mean."

"Or to him about her?"

"Not at all."

"Can you?"

"Not yet. Nothing to be gained that way." Again her eyes kept careful watch on his face.

"Brookes, do you think Astrid loves Robert, really deeply?"

"Don't you?"

"Yes, in a rather complicated way."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she looks up to him as an artist, and down to him as a little boy. Actually, she probably understands him perfectly, would break her heart over him, and forgive him anything. He's been good for her, too, don't forget that. Astrid is a greater artist because of him than she would have been without him. You know, I think he loves her, too, in his way."

"And that is?"

"A little hard to define—but a way that would be eminently unsatisfactory to a woman who wanted more."

"You're being too cryptic for me. I don't follow you at all."

"Well, Robert is like a good many artists, and like a good many men who aren't artists; there are several facets, or many, to his personality, or nature, or char-

acter—whatever you want to call it. He's completely given to Astrid in one way, and completely given to Leslie in another, and probably could be just as completely given to some one else in still another way—Marcia, for instance."

"*Marcia?*"

"She's very interested in him."

Brookes glanced at the clock. "Do you think, my dear, that you may perhaps become a little fantastic at this hour of the night!"

"Whenever you become so elaborately astonished I know, invariably, that you have already thought of the same thing."

"Have you, by any chance, arranged matters in your imagination so that he can be in love with three women at the same time?"

"I see you've thought of it, too. Only I don't think he is. But he likes her in a quite different and distinct sort of way. Marcia Deering goes through the world devouring experience. Life hasn't given her exactly what she wanted—whatever that may have been—so she makes a practice of not missing anything else."

"Ellen, you are the maddest woman alive."

"But you agree with me?"

"Don't I—as a usual thing?"

"Usually not so readily as you have tonight."



"Well, I'm going to bed. You're drunk with gossip. Better sleep it off. All the same, I'm for Astrid. For two cents I'd fall in love with her to even things up a little."

"Bless your dear heart, you have been in love with her for the past five years."

He had reached the door, but turned sharply.

"Don't be an idiot."

"I hope *you* won't be, Brookes dear, for I love you very much. Run on, now."

She pushed him out and closed the door. When she turned, the hard blackness of her eyes was dimmed with tears.

## *Part III*

### I

Leslie closed the door of Mabry Hamerick's apartment. It required all the will she possessed not to slam it. But she gave the elevator bell several unnecessarily vicious punches.

Her face was white, and the pupils of her eyes were unnaturally large. Within, she was a seething fury.

Mabry had called her early by telephone and the interview had just concluded.

From time to time Mabry's laboriously sustained rôle of modern worldliness broke down in the most unexpected places. On her return from Boston she had received the news of Evelyn Pell's remarriage. It had irritated her for reasons that she perhaps could not have accurately defined. Added to that, Dora O'Day had served her with the summer fruitage of the winter gossip about Leslie and Ives. Whereupon Mabry had an instant relapse into middle-class respectability. The family name had been brought in for exhibition, although Leslie proved to be better informed about it than Mabry had guessed. There was some familiar talk about the experience of age and the wisdom of youth

harking to sage advice. All of which chimed so badly with Mabry's avowals in her freer moments that Leslie had been stirred to particularly frank derision seasoned with remarks about hypocrisy that stung the older woman deeply.

"There's a lot of difference between the things you think I condone, and what you are doing," declared Mabry.

"And just what do you think I'm doing? You've never asked me. You have only listened to that—to Dora O'Day."

"I guess everybody knows what you're doing."

"And that is?" Leslie's voice retained its level monotone.

"You're living with a man, openly and continually, whom you are not married to."

"I love him."

Mabry sneered.

"Moreover," Leslie continued, "who said I was living with him?"

"Every one knows it, Leslie. Don't insult me."

"It's strange that you think *you* are being insulted. Would you care to know the truth?"

"I already know it. The fact that you have money and a wealthy father, and are not being paid for your services—"

"Please be careful, Aunt Mabry! You don't know the truth, but you are going to hear it. I love Robert Ives. I have not 'lived with him' as your technical phrase puts it, but *that's because he hasn't asked me to*. I have been ready to go to him, or with him, for a long time. I am sure he wants me. The fact is, I told him I would be his mistress. I'd be glad to, because I love him and it's all I have to give him. Is that plain enough for you? I had thought lately that we might never be more than friends—and I'd accept that, too. But it is the vile crew that you have around you that decides for me. He is returning to town this week. I've never lived with him—how I hate your hypocritical phrases! You can't even call a forthright passion by its name. I've never given myself to him, *but I'm going to as soon as he comes back if he wants me!* I ought to thank you after all for forcing this decision. God knows I want to belong to him."

Mabry laughed contemptuously. "Speeches like that are a little theatrical, Leslie. I thought your set looked on dramatics as out-of-date. We'll see what your father has to say."

"Father!"

"Have you forgotten that you have one?"

"Maybe you've forgotten that I'm twenty-one and that I can do as I please. But as for that, I'll tell him

myself. At least I can be assured that he'll hear nothing but the truth."

"A prostitute daughter of a loose mother! The news is sure to make him happy, no matter who tells him."

It was on this remark that Leslie closed the door. When she reached her apartment she went straight to the telephone.

"Western Union? . . . Take a telegram, please . . . Mr. Dombey Pell, Lenox, Massachusetts . . ."

## II

The next afternoon Mr. Pell rang at the door of Leslie's apartment. Leonie, the elderly French maid, admitted him.

"How do you do, Leonie. How is Miss Leslie?"

"Very well, sir. I think she was not expecting you until the 5:10. I'll call her right away."

"Everything's all right?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Miss Leslie seems very well."

"All right. Tell her I'm here."

"Certainly, sir. Will you wait in the sitting room?"

He entered the room and remained standing as he took in the details of the ultra-modern furnishings. It was an expressive room for all of its exotic look. There were no pictures on the wall, but several jade and crystal carvings caught and held the eye. A large table in-

laid with glass and amaranth wood was littered with books in tooled bindings. A single photograph in a brocade mounting stood on the tiny painted piano.

Dombey Pell was a massive man. His appearance was an unusual mixture of the financier and the scholar. The bold features lost something of their predatory aspect in subtle chiselings that lent them a fine frostiness. Leslie resembled him only in the setting and color of the eyes—extraordinarily brilliant, dark-blue eyes with a cool, impersonal expression.

Leslie entered, closed the door and leaned back against it. The two stood for a moment looking at each other.

“Hello, Dad.” Her voice was a trifle breathless.

“Hello, Leslie. What’s up?”

She crossed quickly to him and kissed him warmly.

“Thank you for coming. I wouldn’t have asked it, but I wanted to talk to you.”

Dombey Pell’s gaze remained impassive but intent.

“I heard about—about Mother. I—I hope it doesn’t mean anything to you, Dad.”

“Is that the reason you sent for me?” Not a trace of emotion colored his tone. His speech had the same peculiar monotone that Ives had first noticed in Leslie’s.

“It doesn’t mean anything to you—any more, does

it?" She kept her hands on his shoulders. Both of his hands cupped her elbows.

"No."

"I am glad. Sit down."

"What's up, Leslie?"

She hesitated. "Everything. I've got to talk to you about—myself. Can you stay to dinner?"

"Yes—or we'll go out to dine. Whatever you wish."

"Then we'll go out later. Excuse me one minute."

As the door closed he settled himself with something of relief showing in his face. There had been a reassuring look in her eyes.

Two years earlier when Leslie had rebelled at the life of Lenox in the big house with him they had parted on bad terms. He had agreed that she might live in New York, though he had nothing but contempt for the proffered chaperonage of his sister Mabry. He had insisted on Leslie's taking Leonie with her. The elderly French woman had been with Leslie since her birth and had always managed the headstrong child and her volcanic temper better than any one else. Evelyn Pell had never been anything but an aggravation to the child's worst traits. He spoke the truth when he said that her remarriage meant nothing to him. He knew much more about Leslie and her daily life in New York than she guessed, though he would have scorned

to hear of it through any other channel than the friendly and well-meaning Leonie. He disapproved of many of her friends, though he knew that there were few of any other kind, or code. He was not afraid of small mistakes for her. He knew that certain instincts of hers made for safety. She was not cheap. But he knew equally that she was capable of big mistakes. He wondered as he sat waiting for her. Probably no one had ever seen his eyes soften as much as they did at this moment, but the expression cleared instantly on her return.

### III

"I want to talk to you, and I want to talk not as your daughter—though perhaps that way, too, a little—but as one human being to another. I wish you could think of me not as your daughter for a while. I'd like your feeling for me not to be distorted by the usual fatherly reactions. Sounds brutal, maybe, but I can't say exactly what I mean."

"It was your wish two years ago that I should think of you in that way. I've had a good deal of practice."

"Don't, please. You'll make it impossible for me, and I do want to talk to you. I have no one else. But it isn't that," she hastened her words. "I'm not whining, or going to whine about anything. I want you to know something, and I want to tell you myself."



"Go on."

"I am very much in love with a man—I have been for several months. I've never cared for any one else in that way, not the least. He loves me, but he is married—not exactly unhappily, either. People—well—people have been talking about us. The usual things. They don't happen to be true. I'm not his mistress. We've been—just—"

"I understand. Go on."

"But I'm not going to be just friends any longer. That's what I wanted to say to you. I wanted you to hear it from me instead of Aunt Mabry."

"Mabry!"

"Yes. She gave me a lecture yesterday, told me all the nasty lies she had heard—and believed—and called me a prostitute. She thinks I am, I suppose, though I don't care one little damn what she thinks. She is an old fool with all of her talk about modern ways and her silly attempts to be one of the gang that infests her place—it's all a ridiculous veneer over a middle-class inability to tell the difference between nastiness and—me!"

"Leave Mabry out of it. What else is there?"

"Nothing else. I met him at one of her parties. I love him, and want him—that's all, I guess."

"Who is he?"

"Robert Ives. He is an artist—a painter—one of the fine ones."

"Never heard of him."

"He's a friend of Mr. Parker's."

"Brookes Parker?"

"Yes. They have been friends for years. Mr. Ives has never been much in America. He's a gentleman, Daddy."

"H'mm. How old is he?"

"Twice my age, about."

"He asked you to be his mistress?"

"No, he didn't. We were together a lot. I saw that he liked me. I was in love with him from the start. He told me, finally, and said that he was not asking anything of me. I offered to be his mistress then—at least, I told him I would be if he wanted me to. But he has never—we have—"

"Speak prose, Leslie."

"We've never done anything wrong, nor has he ever suggested it. I know he wants me. He has never been in this apartment, but I have gone to his studio frequently. I stayed all night there the first night I met him."

"What?"

"We left Aunt Mabry's party together. He said he would show me his pictures some day and I asked him to take me there then. I wasn't really interested in his pictures. I suppose I was afraid I'd never see him again, and I couldn't bear the thought. I felt that I had to tie him to me in some way. I suppose I thought maybe if he'd know me better he would see me again. We went to the studio. It was cold and quite late, and while he was making coffee I fell asleep on the couch. It was daylight when I awoke. Some one saw us together early the next morning. The talk began then. I didn't hear it, but I was sure of it."

"What about his wife?"

"I don't know her. She has been in Europe all winter. She's a pianist—concert pianist. She came back early in the summer. He is fond of her, though I don't know just exactly in what way. He hasn't talked much about her. What he said sounded pretty nice. I guess she's a fine person, but I have an idea that she's self-centered and that they've sort of settled down to being good friends or something. He seems very young in some ways to be the important artist he is—inexperienced, really. You know—as if he had heard about everything but didn't actually know. He's sweet." She smiled a little at this finish, and a faint answering crinkle showed about her father's eyes.

"Doubtless. Why doesn't he tell her—give her a divorce?"

"I don't want him to. I'm afraid I can't tell you what I feel. I tell you he likes her, is fond of her—loves her in a way. They've been married for years, lived through all that people do live through. If he lost her—if she left him, he'd lose something he wants and something I fancy he needs. He'd never love me in the same way—certainly, I don't want him to—but he'd never love me as much afterward. She'd be there always. I'm willing to belong to him in that one way and leave her the rest."

"She probably wouldn't think that was much. Have you thought about her?"

"I didn't at first. She was just a shadow. I've thought a lot about her since she came back. If she knew that he loves her in the way I know he does she'd know she had a great deal. And I know that's something I can never have, because it's a part of the past. Once when we were lunching together he was telling me about some funny Americans in Fiesole and he said, 'Do you remember—?' Then he stopped short. You see? For a moment he had forgotten I hadn't been a part of all those years. He would lose those years if he lost her, and—he mustn't. He wouldn't be happy if he did, no matter how much he loves me, and he's nice

enough never to think I was to blame, but it would do something to what he thinks of me. He'd love me, maybe not less, but differently."

"You seem to have thought of a lot of things. Strange you haven't thought of a lot more. There are more things to think about. What do you expect him to do? Keep both of you?"

"That sounds frightful when you put it so. But—in a way, yes. Men have kept their wives and had mistresses. It isn't new, is it?"

"It seems a strange ambition for an individualist like you, to wish to be just that. You are willing to share a man with another woman, to be second fiddle?"

"In a way, yes. Daddy, I haven't asked a single question about her, but there are things I understand—things I think I know—that make it possible from my point of view."

"Leslie, there's no use pretending I don't think the whole thing is rotten—he more than any one, and you as well. I may have one or two old-fashioned streaks left in me. After all you're my child. Of course I'd rather see you have a liaison with some one who is somebody in some sort of way than be the kind of loose thing I read about in the comic papers, or to see you married to a lot of men I know."

"There isn't any such person as you see in the

papers, Dad. There are thousands and thousands who are much worse. I've never seen the original of a John Held girl if that's what you mean. I suppose some people do get an idea of the younger crowds from jokes like that. Most of the ones I've met aren't jokes. They're much less pleasant."

"We're getting off the subject. Is there anything I can say to change your mind? Will you come home with me—for a while anyway, and think it over?"

"I've thought it over. Thank you, just the same."

"Why not go away somewhere else then? Take Leonie and go—anywhere. Around the world. Go to Paris and buy all the clothes you can think of."

She smiled helplessly. "Dad, you sound like a book. I'm not a child. I can't be distracted by bright play-things. I'm a woman."

"And a woman wants more than you are going to get out of this. You think his wife ought to be satisfied with what you are willing to leave to her. You'll be surprised to learn that you won't be satisfied with what *you* have left. It won't be enough, Leslie. You'll be glad at first to see him once a week or twice. Then you'll want more and more and more of him. What you have will seem nothing. She will seem to have everything. Then you'll want children by and by. Then what are you going to do?"

"I'm willing to think out a lot of things when the right time comes."

"The right time to think of some of them is now."

She stood up abruptly and held both arms wide.

"Look at me, Daddy. I am what I am—you ought to know pretty well what that is. I'm fairly intelligent, and I'm much like you in every way. I don't think I'm much like Mother, though she must have given me something. I could do without almost anything I'm used to; but I can't do without Robert Ives. You may call it a sex spasm if you want to. Maybe it is, but it is more. Look at me. You know I'm young, and alive, and everything I am fairly shouts itself to me, day and night. Still, I tell you it is something more than this—this clamorous flesh. I could perhaps be just friends with him. I've been just that for months. No one believes it. We're past suspicion. People think they *know*. What's the use? They'll think it forever. If it's damage that's done, then it's done, and done for good. I think I don't care. There isn't any one who means a thing to me but Robert, and you. You do mean something. I want you to understand me and see that there can be, and is, something decent about me. Not that I wouldn't go ahead whether you believe it or not. I'm just being fair with you."

"It doesn't sound like I mean much to you—still, I think it's more than you know."

She sat down on the arm of his chair. "Try to see it as I see it—no matter if it's the wrong way—so that you understand me. You are looking back on much that I'm looking forward to, even if you are not old. There was a time when you were my age. You must have felt as I do. Maybe you felt once about Mother as I do about Robert. It wasn't your fault that it didn't work out. But if you had lost her, you would have gone dissatisfied through life. Isn't that so?"

She arose again with the first sign of deep agitation that she had shown. "What's it all about? What I feel would be all right under different circumstances. That's ridiculous. If Robert weren't married all of these damn fools would call it holy. It happens that he married some one way back when I was a baby. Now we meet and the same feeling is wrong, and people like Aunt Mabry call it bad names. It's the same love it would be if he were not married. There's something wrong somewhere, but it isn't my love for him. What are these laws and conventions anyway? They're abstractions. They aren't something real. It isn't as though I'd ruin his career or smash something concrete. I only want to love him and be let alone."

"You won't be let alone. You can't remake society



and the world just to make yourself more comfortable. That's what we'd all like to do, but that isn't the game. I am understanding what you feel. I grant you that your love itself is all right and would be all right under different circumstances. I've no quarrel with that. I'm talking about something else. I'm talking about life as we must live it. Be patient a minute and listen. For the sake of understanding, try, as you asked me, to see this, even if you don't agree with it, so that you will, at least, have looked at it all around. Every one of us begins life as an individualist. It would be fine to live as we want to. But we can't play solo. The rules are not made that way. To make them all over to agree with our kind of game—well, it wouldn't even be good sportsmanship, would it? It's like tennis, or chess. If you are going to play chess, you play according to rule, or no one will play with you. It wouldn't be chess. Part of the game—the very exhilaration of it—is in winning according to rule.”

“I see what you mean. It sounds awfully clever. But—well, somehow life just isn't chess. I'm not clever enough to answer that, but I feel—I do feel that there's a flaw in your argument. Everything in me says no to the rules. Nature and all this—this New York, or the world—they are dead against each other. There's something in that that means something. I don't know what

it is. This is getting too philosophical or metaphysical, or whatever the word is. All of these words are like quicksand. There's no foothold anywhere for me. Maybe—maybe it isn't anything more than the biological thing. Maybe it is just flesh screaming for the babies I was meant to have. If it is, then that's right, too. But—oh, I sound like poetry or something—if that is what is at the bottom of it—*it has wings*. It's beautiful. *It's as beautiful as God.*"

She went to the window and looked out. He did not answer. Something a little wistful showed in his eyes as he looked at her, so slim and young, so unbeaten as yet. How would she take it? How would her pride, her impatient spirit take it—all that was sure to come?

She turned again toward him. "This chess idea. That won't do exactly. You said something about playing solo. I hadn't thought of it, but it does seem that we might come as near doing it, being independent, as any one. He's established—a famous man—and established in an art that doesn't ask questions about the artist. He's probably not rich as you count those things, but I'm sure that he has, and always has had, plenty of money. I don't suppose I'll ever need money either. You see, Dad, there isn't one of the usual practical problems. We can go anywhere in the world we want to, and—"

"I think one of your biggest mistakes is right there. We pay for everything we get. The less money has to do with it the higher the price."

She made an obstinate and contemptuous motion with her head. "Oh, you mean social ostracism. What do I care about that? Who in the world do I know that I couldn't do without? We've never been in the very inner circle anyway—at least Aunt Mabry hasn't. It's just as Aucassin said about going to Heaven. I don't want to. It would be dull. I look in sometimes to the very holy of holies. I couldn't bear them. They're dull."

"Lots of funny things happen, Leslie, as the years go by. You can't imagine it, I know, but it is not only possible, but likely, that some day you will want that very society you are turning up your nose about. They are your people by custom, training, and experience. They may not be picturesque, but they are not cheap. And you don't like cheap things. You're likely to find yourself in company with a lot of second-raters later on. It's amazing what a comfort dullness can be as we grow older."

"I suppose we do have to pay for everything. I feel now that I'm willing to pay to have what I want. I'd have to pay if I didn't have it—I'd pay with regrets of another kind. What's the difference?"

It was his turn to look helpless. She seemed so young

in some ways, with all of the shining, hard determination of youth, and so old in others. He could see so well from her point of view, but she couldn't believe it, nor dream that he saw far beyond. That, he thought, is what youth can never believe. Perhaps the best he could do would be to try to save her as much of the beating as possible. But could he do that? Could any one?

She sat down again, and her voice resumed its normal unaccented cadence.

"I haven't had a very good time as it is, but I'm not complaining about it. I have a little taste, undeveloped yet, I suppose, for things beyond my crowd. I've had the best times with Robert, and alone. I'm not even popular. You see, Dad, I'm not a very acquiescent person. But I've been let in already for the worst there is by Aunt Mabry's friends. I couldn't do worse to myself than has been done."

"It's pretty bad, Leslie. But unfounded gossip does sometimes die a natural death. You see you are planning to make the dummy alive. You are going to justify them. As it is you have the comfort of knowing they lie."

"But don't you see I can't take them into consideration when I'm making a decision? I was furious yester-

day, but it's gone now. Everybody seems very far away. After all, this is my show."

"I don't think you have felt the weight of anything yet. You are twenty years old—"

"Twenty-one."

"Well, twenty-one. You have, we may suppose, thirty or forty, or fifty, or even sixty years to live. Whatever you start now is going to have its consequences in some way, however indirectly, until the end. The cumulative power of what society can and will do to you can't be estimated. You can't look for such revolutions in society as would change that."

"I see what you mean, but I can't seem to care. I can think of it, but it doesn't seem to matter in the least. Please, Daddy, please believe that I am listening to you. I wouldn't have asked you to come if I hadn't intended to listen. I do see what you mean. I've thought of a lot of things. Besides I have read a lot. I know where I stand and what I am. *I am the Other Woman, and the Other Woman is always wrong.* The whole vocabulary of the language is against me. That's an injustice I can't forgive, or tolerate. All the good words are on the side of convention, and all the bad ones are for me. You can't even mention me, or describe my position, or my love for Robert, without using words that condemn me. The case is made up

against me just by saying it. That's not fair. It gives the other side the whole advantage. Call a man a murderer and the thing is done. You've set him outside. That's what makes me so mad. I love Robert just as any girl in the world loves the man she marries. But say 'Leslie Pell is in love with a married man,' and you might as well use the entire Old Testament vocabulary and finish me up."

"Ethically, you may be half right. Mind you, I say maybe; but practically, I know you are wholly wrong."

He paused. She sat so still and took all he had to say so squarely. He damned the sentimental recollection of her childhood that interposed itself and checked the hard "Old Testament words" he wished for her own sake to say. It was hard for him to dissociate this slim girl, with the grave sentences on her lips, from the child she used to be. It was like striking a baby. Yet he felt that he must not be soft. This was a crisis and all the more serious because of the spirit in which she dared all that she meant to dare. He had lived so much in a world of compromise where a little discretion or common sense concealment was the cover of a multitude of sins and a shield for their attendant consequences. How say this to Leslie who was being so honest, so frank, so sincere? If he suggested any sort of half prudence to her, he would seem to con-

done all that he had just condemned. He would lay a smirching hand on something that to her was inviolably clean. He found himself in a curious moral impasse. One shadow of giving in, or suggestion that she give in to the opinion of the world she despised would stamp him as one of them. He felt already that she was determined on a course. The thought of Ives enraged him. Why in hell didn't the man go away? He was a cad—and yet, he hadn't really behaved exactly like one. How could any one know? Episodes in his own life recurred with unsettling clarity. Leslie's case would have appeared very different if he had heard it from any one else. Maybe Ives had his justifications, too. It was all so snarled, and wearisome, and bewildering. Who knew what was right? Why couldn't people let other people alone? This affair, now—what of it? Mabry was a damn fool—always had been. He plunged unexpectedly into words.

"There is one clean-cut fact you must face. Do this and you are declass  . Once declass   you are forever so."

"It's a word, just a word. I told you all the bad words were against me. Declass  ! I am that now. I don't care. I wish you didn't."

The light was failing. Leslie's face began to blur in the dusk.

"Let's go to dinner. I told Leonie we'd go out. We'll

go to the Ambassador, it's just a few blocks. I'd like lights and music tonight. Maybe it's the last time I'll go out with a respectable man." She laughed, but the laugh died quickly.

"Listen, Dad. What are you going to do with me?"

"Do with you?"

"Yes. Are you going to—to drop me?"

He drew her to him and held her tight.

"Hurry up. I didn't have any lunch."

#### IV

The next morning Dombey Pell went to see his sister Mabry. The interview resounded with the clash of two gladiatorial personalities.

"It's unfortunate that you saw her first. She has just enough of Evelyn in her to be able to pull the wool over your eyes." Mabry's ancient animosity against Dombey's socially superior wife flamed.

"I think we could omit mention of Evelyn," he replied as quietly as Mabry's defective hearing permitted. "You may recall if you use the intelligence I think you have and the good memory I know you have, that pulling the wool over my eyes is precisely what Evelyn never succeeded in doing. It also happens that Leslie has inherited our own habit of not resorting to that sometimes useful and commendable trick. You and I



rather pride ourselves on speaking our minds—a doubtful prerogative of our independence that has cost us a good many friends. I don't think Leslie even prides herself on it. She simply does it naturally."

Mabry held her black box toward him as though she were covering him with a gun.

"She's just shameless—"

"Which sometimes indicates an absence of guilt."

"Dombey, this thing has become common talk."

"Your adjective is well chosen."

"It isn't necessary to be insulting."

"I had hoped it wouldn't be."

"You are beyond me. Your daughter is having a scandalous affair with—"

"What did she tell you?"

"She told me she was not—"

"I believe that."

"—but that she was going to."

"I believe that, too."

Mabry was aghast. "But *going to* is worse than—worse than *has been*. It's so deliberate, and cold-blooded."

"We usually complain because these things aren't deliberate."

"For Heaven's sake! Are you approving of her? Are you giving your permission? It's monstrous!"

"I'm not approving of her, and I haven't given my permission. From what I hear you've known of this for some time. I believe your associates see to it that you are well informed generally."

She awarded him a malevolent glare. "I had no idea what was happening. I thought it was one of these flirtations—I didn't know, for instance, that she had stayed all night with him the very first time she met him. Do you know that? And you believe that she is—deliberate!"

"I know exactly what happened."

"That requires very little imagination."

"You have too little sometimes, and too much at others."

"This is not a question of imagination."

"Well, Mabry, we aren't getting anywhere. I've seen Leslie. We've come nearer a rapprochement than we have in two years. I understand her pretty well, and I sympathize with her in a number of particulars. I don't approve of her. I think she's making a damnable mistake. This fellow Ives—he's the one I can't understand. I can at least grasp what she's talking about by keeping my mind on her age. But he doesn't belong to her generation."

"Robert Ives is a charming gentleman, and fine

artist—and, I suppose, a man. Good Lord! I don't blame men nowadays—"

"I wouldn't exactly expect you to."

This remark escaped Mabry.

"—the town is thick with—with hussies."

Dombey laughed at this echo from a Victorian past.

"It's this way, Mabry. I have no picturesque impulses to go about shooting any one. Besides, it wouldn't do any good."

"Neither can you blame a man for something you believe he didn't do, but which you think *she's* going to do. If it weren't Ives, it would be some one else."

"I'm surprised to find myself in agreement with you." He continued, "I just want to say this: I think you'd better lay off the whole matter. It isn't your show, and astoundingly, it doesn't seem to be mine, though I'm blest if I'm sure I understand how it all happens to be out of my hands. It's her show."

"It's her funeral."

"Oh, I know what's coming to her. There'll be plenty, though it may be different from what either of us expect. The fact remains that she's my flesh and blood, and whatever happens I'm waiting for her whenever she needs me. I hope she'll escape what I'm sure she can't. There aren't many of us, Mabry, and we ought to be tribal enough not to make it worse for her."

He was astute enough to know that any appeal to family solidarity would be strong. He also knew the deep reservoirs of sentiment beneath the hard surface of her cynical and flippant worldliness. She might never admit it but he knew the certainty of her response. He had come prepared to play upon just this trait of hers. She softened instantly.

“I think you are wrong as a wrong-headed person can be, Dombey. I have never been able to understand how you—a man with all of the character and strength and decision you have—were never able to set your house in order. You bend all kinds of men into anything you want, or you break them, and yet you let your wife smash up things; you couldn’t hold Leslie with you, and you can’t swerve her an inch now. It’s beyond me. Look at you—there you sit—a failure in two of the great issues of your life.”

He didn’t answer and she went on in a tone that few had ever heard from her. “Look at me for that matter. I’m a silly old woman with too much money and not a thing left that I care about, except you—and Leslie, though you mayn’t believe that. What’s come over us? Remember Father and Grandpa, and their women folks? They were like iron. Can you imagine my getting out from under Pa’s hand the way Leslie has gotten out from yours?”

"But you never did love him. Honest, now, did you, Mabry?"

She looked blank for an instant. "I was afraid of him. Maybe that was better. I don't know—everything was different. My God, Dombey, I'm a lonely old woman sometimes."

This was exactly the mood he had hoped to create.

"Why don't you come down here oftener, Dombey? A good fight now and then would do you good. Me, too. I'm going to South America next week. Wish I weren't."

"Do you think Leslie would go with you?"

"No. We can't pull wool over her eyes, either."

"I hate like the devil to leave her here all summer. I don't know what her plans are. Isn't it ridiculous that I don't know what my own child is going to do?"

"Did you ask her?"

"I don't think so. There were other things to talk about."

"I wish she'd marry some one."

"Mabry, you just look modern. You're as antiquated as the family album and the corner what-not made out of empty spools. Marriage isn't a solution for problems any more. It's just a phase of experience."

"You know," he continued, "there was something I wished I could say to her, but I was ashamed. She wouldn't have understood it. Maybe no one would."

His voice trailed off. He looked a little the dependent younger brother she used to help and protect.

"What?"

"I wanted—oh, Lord!—It sounds rottener than anything. But—I wished that I could suggest for her own sake that she'd be a little discreet—cover it up a little. Why, she talks as though she meant to make a parade of it!"

"Don't worry about that. Leslie is secretive by nature—like Evelyn. She has a stock of practical prudence that would surprise you. Besides, Ives won't let her. Ives has a wife."

"It's horrible for us to talk this way about it."

"Not at all. There's no sense in advertising unless you have something to sell."

Mabry sat up. All of her social acumen came to the surface. She looked the campaigner.

"Leave some things to me, Dombey."

He arose. "I felt that I could. I'll be going. Good-by. Hope you have a good trip. Let me hear from you."

"Good-by. I'm glad you came. Mind you, I think you're not doing your duty. I guess I'm the only decent one left in the family."

That same morning Leslie received a note from Ives. She stood at the window rereading it.

How wrong I may be I do not know—or how right. I have thought and thought until I am tired, but my brain circles back and back to one thing and to that only—I want you and I cannot do without you. What kind of happiness we may be able to make out of it I don't know; I only know that somehow it must be. Just now I cannot feel that we can build a happiness on the unhappiness of others—you understand me, don't you? Can we be practical and sensible to that extent?

I shall be in town a few hours after this reaches you. I can perhaps reach you by 'phone. I love you, dear. Please believe that, whatever reservations you may have about me.

Will you be sorry, I wonder, that you ever met me?

She folded the paper and tore it slowly into long strips, then across, and crumpled the bits in her tightly closed palm. She stood for a long time staring at the façade of the buildings opposite as though the walls hid something from her. A look that seemed close kin to fright gathered like a heavy storm in her eyes, but her head held its habitual pose of pride and defiance.

v

Leslie sat by the window of Ives' studio late one afternoon in October. Autumn had passed like a weariness over the little park below. The trees were nearly bare and the Indian summer warmth was pervaded by

an increasing chill, as though a door to the north had been left open.

She had always liked autumn, but autumn in the country was something quite different. The pomp and splendor of color and the tang of quickening air had all of the thrill of some momentous beginning. Here in the city summer merely dried up and blew away. She turned her eyes away from the tattered look of Gramercy. It was depressing. She sank deeper into the corner of the couch and held her book against her knees as she gave the pages an impatient flutter. The printed narrative seemed lifeless. Most books were false, she felt. It was hard to believe that life ever revealed even this much of a pattern. It was, on the contrary, all color and confusion. She screwed her head to one side to look at the picture Ives was painting. More like that, she thought—a fascination of color with a meaning that eluded her. She considered him a little curiously. He, too, eluded her. When he painted he was beyond her reach. It was as though he had disappeared into a labyrinth to which she had no key. He was a stranger to her, but no more a stranger at this moment than she was to herself. She closed the book and burrowed, face down, among the pillows.

She was terrified again and again at the storms that swept through her. She had an unexplainable feeling



that the ghosts of a hundred unknown ancestors awoke and clamored. She had opened a door into the inner sanctuary of her being and now it was filled with all of these strange, uninvited guests. This was no fault of Ives, nor of herself. But she was surprised. She had expected a clear and uncomplicated result—a simple satisfaction of loving and being loved.

She had calculated without knowledge of secret forces in herself—forces that were the sum of echoes of a past of which she knew nothing. She had matched the stubborn egotism of her individuality and the pliant philosophy of youth against amazing antagonisms sleeping unsuspected in secret channels of her deepest self. It was difficult to deal with a resistance whose source was unknown and whose power was unguessable.

On one hand were arrayed the ecstasies and splendors of an answered and answering love. On the other stood an inexplicable discontent.

Leslie had known nothing of the difference in the way a woman gives herself to love and a man's way. Love with her was supreme—an all-dominating emotion to which every other thought and feeling adjusted itself. It permeated her completely, colored and transformed everything; created a new heaven, a new earth, and a new self. It was with blank dismay that she was

coming to know that for Ives it was only something added to what he had and to what he had been. She turned from love to find utter change everywhere. Every path before her feet was untrodden. She saw Ives turn easily to his known and accustomed life.

Even now, as he painted, she knew that he was unaware of her existence. Ives the artist held absolute ascendancy over the Ives who was her lover. Her essential sanity reassured her on this point. Of course—that was as it should be, and must be. She could not be jealous of his art, but she did feel very much a child shut out from adult affairs.

She had imagined, perhaps, some sort of kingdom that she was to share with him—something that was peculiarly and exclusively their own. She had not been quite definite in her ideas of just what it was to be. Certainly she had dreamed of being lifted out of her own limited world into some sort of newly created one with him. As it was it seemed that he merely came into her life and out again. He talked gayly of his friends, of dinners, of parties, of what this one said, and that one did, seeming unaware of her exclusion from the major part of his existence. She had come to wait and listen for those accounts of all that happened to him while he was away from her. It was a pain that she dared not shirk. To escape even one sentence of what

was sometimes torture, meant to lose just that much of him.

There was something frantic in her twisting thoughts. His friends—and Astrid . . . they interested and entertained him. They offered him much that he wanted and was accustomed to. Perhaps he was even glad at times to go from her to them. She buried her face deeper in the pillows and reminded herself that this was unfair. She was merely working herself into a state of mind that derived purely from imaginings. Ives had been all that an ardent lover could be. But he didn't belong to her as she belonged to him. She sat up suddenly. Her father had said just this. "You won't be satisfied with what you have. You will think it nothing." It was doubly humiliating to have a prophecy fulfilled, and so quickly. He had predicted more—much more that must not come to pass. All that he had said was true, of course, for most people, but she had set herself above ordinary standards and ordinary reactions. Therefore she must meet events extraordinarily. She must get a grip on herself—*now*. What a horrible thing it would be if she began to feel regrets! Such a disloyalty to the man she loved, and to her own love, was unthinkable. She had talked so bravely to her father. Part of that bravery she knew now, had been the courage of ignorance. She had underestimated the

strength, the consuming power of her love. In a few short weeks so many protecting walls of her personality had burned away, leaving her open to a thousand unexpected invasions. She knew herself the battleground of all the conventions and traditions of society and of the race. There was no one to blame but herself that so many defenses were down. These were the very defenses she had scorned. She knew, too, that she had no weapon but her own courage.

An expression settled on her face that brought out a new resemblance to Dombey Pell. Dombey Pell's enemies knew that expression and respected it.

. . . Her thoughts wandered again. She had not seen many of her own set lately, but that was quite natural. They had been scattered for the summer while she had elected to stay in town. She hadn't even been troubled with the usual invitations, some of which would have been difficult to refuse. They were drifting back now from Europe and the mountains. She had seen a party of old friends just three days before when she was lunching at Sherry's. They had waved gayly to her as they went out, but had not stopped at her table. She had been a little glad. She didn't want to talk to them just now . . . Amy Darlington's wedding must be close at hand now—yes—why, it was only a week distant. There had been elaborate planning last spring.

It came to her with a mild shock—she hadn't received an invitation! That was strange. She had liked Amy better than most of the crowd. Amy had seemed to like her, too.

She turned to the window again and looked out a little wonderingly. Could it possibly be that it was intentional? Was it a slight? A dozen incidents, unnoticed at the time, swooped together in a group. The little look of wonder that had become almost wistful hardened instantly to contempt. Did they dare—could they possibly dare to pretend a disapproval, or, maybe, actually to feel it? She remembered the parties when she had been in disfavor because she wouldn't do the things they did, or when she showed the slightest distaste for their freedoms. That ghastly "baby party" at the Toveys' when the more than daring infant costumes had been but a prelude to an evening that "went the limit." No one knew where the others had slept that night. Her eyes were angrily black at the memory. Did they—any of them—dare to think . . . But Amy Darlington had been a little different. It did hurt a little. Amy was to have a gay wedding at her Long Island home. Something lay for a moment on Leslie's mood—some faint nostalgia—perhaps for a kind of association and surrounding that had never been hers.

She had not been happy, certainly not since she was a very small child. The recollection of her mother held nothing fond or tender. Only Leonie in all her world seemed kind, and only lately, since that interview in the summer, had her father appeared anything but remote and forbidding. There were no tears in her eyes, but they seemed very large and bright as she watched Ives, who was still working, still unaware of her presence.

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. She must not become sentimental. She had never felt sorry for herself before and she must not begin now. She reached for a cigarette, but did not light it. There was in her eyes and on her face the same look that Ives had noted the first time he saw her—a look of loneliness that reached deep to an actual isolation of spirit. With it showed again a little of the stoical pride that set her so deceptively in the mold of insolence and indifference. The feeling and the expression were momentary. She walked to the mantel and hunted for matches. Ives glanced up and gave her a quick smile. It was a smile holding such gayety and happiness, such pleasure in her presence, and such a frank tenderness that her mood vanished like a breath of smoke. What did anything matter but this? Amy Darlington and all of

her crowd receded to infinite distances. Whatever they might think, or feel, or do, could be of no importance. They were nothing to her—nothing, nothing, nothing!

## VI

Ives stepped back from his work, laid down his palette, and wiped his hands.

"I think that will have to do for today. I think I deserve tea."

Leslie extinguished her cigarette and held out her arms.

"Mind your dress—this smock—"

"I don't care. I don't care. Hold me tight, please."

She drew back after a moment and held his face between her hands while she searched his eyes.

"You do love me, Robert, you do, don't you?"

"With all my heart, dearest."

"You must, you must." She laid her face against his smock and burrowed under his chin like a child. "Um-m. You smell like a paint box! Run on now and tidy up. I'll have tea in two minutes.

"Robert!" She stopped and turned.

"Yes?"

"Are you going up to Ranley tonight?"

"Why—I don't know. I hadn't thought about it."

"Don't go." She came back. Her eyes were very

bright again, but she did not flush. "Stay here tonight. I don't want you to go."

"All right. I'll telephone. I'm not expected really until Friday."

"May I stay, too, until Friday—with you?"

He held her close again. "You know you may."

## VII

Astrid, yielding to the insistence of Ellen and Brookes, had spent the latter part of the summer and the early fall at Ranley. Ives had divided his time between Ranley and town. It was a strange situation, and each one was aware, though unequally, of the strangeness.

It had been arranged that Astrid should make a six weeks' European tour beginning in November, before playing in New York. She practiced long hours, but her work was beset by fitful moods. She was uneasy, but she did not know why.

Ellen and Brookes watched anxiously, and filled the time with every diversion they could. Each one, in fact, watched all of the others.

Brookes knew that the calm was unnatural and the peace false. Underneath the quiet lay a creeping threat like fire moving under a blanket of forest leaves. At any moment everything might be in conflagration.



## VIII

. . . And then one night at Ranley, Ives told Astrid everything.

He did not know exactly how it came about. They had talked late in the little sitting room that divided their bedrooms. The conversation swerved unexpectedly into deeper and more personal channels. Astrid had long sensed something profoundly unsettling in his restlessness that she connected with the nervous disarray of his painting. Similarly, he had wondered about her unaccustomed mental tension. A few questions and the situation lay bare between them.

"I am not sure, Astrid," he said quietly, "that I can tell you clearly what has happened, or why, or that I can explain in any understandable way just what I feel, or what I am being. I have wanted to talk to you; I have tried several times, but I did not know myself what there was, or is, to say. It's my relation to you that I fear you cannot see, or believe."

"I think you should try to tell me anyway. That, of course, is what I must know."

"Incredible as it sounds, Astrid—and I shall not be surprised if you don't believe me—that is unchanged. I am to you what I always have been—as you are to me what you have been. I'm not sure—and I don't

mean this to sound brutal—I'm not sure, at this moment, that I know exactly what that is. We have always gone our own ways pretty much. You never did pry into my mind as I understand wives have a way of doing, and I can't remember that I've done anything similar to you. We've respected each other greatly—I have the same respect now as always. I suppose that's the reason I'm talking. It seems to me as I look back over the years that we have always had a warm, understanding comradeship. We've been such good friends. I admire you—I admire you personally. I've always been proud of your distinction, the way you come into a room, the way you walk on the stage at concerts, your talent and all that. Your playing has been a great thing for me, greater, maybe, than you know. I never lied when I said long ago that I loved you. It's been a long time since either of us has said that, hasn't it? All the same, I'm not lying now when I say I love you. I do. It's one way of loving, what I feel for you. Maybe you, as a woman, will say there is just one way of loving, and that is wholly. I'm not sure that is quite true. It's complete enough—what I feel. I'm even sure that you would be glad of what I feel for you, if you could see it. If I could open my head or heart for you and you could see everything just as it is, one thing in exact relation to the others, that you

would not be unhappy about it. I love you, Astrid—I've just got to say it, though I see you don't want me to. I have to be completely honest. It wouldn't be honest to tell you only a part of things. It wouldn't be honest to say just the things to my discredit, however picturesque that might be, or dramatic. I have to say the things in my favor, too. I've looked hard and long at the inside of my head. I've mauled my ideas and feelings over and over until I'm so tired that sometimes I don't care whether any one understands or not. But I want to be fair. You would have less respect for me if I were less fair on what any one would call the illegitimate side of the case. I must be as fair to her as I am to you, and I must be fair to myself. It's all of this that I've turned over and over and over night after night."

"Are you deeply in love with—with Leslie as one loves a woman to marry her?"

"There hasn't been a word of marriage spoken between us. I fancy it's a thought that hasn't occurred to either of us. She seemed to be important and necessary to me in a way—the way of her personality and all that she is, and I think I'm equally important to her. This was a long time coming to pass, you know."

"Well, what do you wish me to do?" Astrid's voice took on an unaccustomed grayness.

"Nothing . . . Oh, I know that's preposterous—monstrous—and maybe the one impossible condition."

"Who knows about this? Not that I think that matters much."

"Brookes knows something about it. What he thinks he knows is probably mostly wrong. There was much gossip in Mrs. Hamerick's motley set—all of that was wrong. Leslie's father knows the exact truth and you do. No one else does."

"I understand now many of the odd things Brookes has said. Would it not be better for him to know at once of the matter—just as it is?"

"Perhaps. I'll tell him, if you think best."

"Yes, I think that would be best."

"Listen, Astrid. Do you understand my state of mind at all? Do you see just what I feel about—both of you?"

"I think I do not. I will try, Robert, to see what you mean, or what you think you mean. It really seems quite clear to me, but I think it isn't as you believe it to be. I think it is, as you say, that we have always been friends. I thought we had been more—much more. I have been more. I must say that, even though it is humiliating to say it now. I think you are quite simply in love with another woman. I think you are sorry for me, and that is one thing you must not be. If you have

anything left in your heart for me, don't be sorry for me. It would be the one thing I couldn't bear. I think you may not wish at this moment to give me up and marry her, but that will come later."

"I don't want to give you up."

"And, strangely, I don't want to give you up. I don't know, yet, what I should do. I must have time. I can't decide at once. I—we—must do what is best for all of us. You see, Robert, it isn't just as it must appear to others. We know many men among our acquaintances who have mistresses. But she isn't simply your mistress. She seems to be—nice. I don't find myself disliking her. She is not a courtesan. I half wish she were. It isn't surprising that some one loves you very much. I have seen other women be very much interested in you. That, at least, I cannot hold against her."

"It isn't her fault, Astrid."

"Robert—quite honestly, now—do you wish a divorce? Would it be best?"

"No."

"Then what do you wish?"

"Nothing. Astrid, here we are, three intelligent people of a modern world that prides itself on its superiority over the ideas and ways of the past. Surely there

is some way, some sort of compromise, or adjustment that is possible for us."

"You mean, quite simply, that you wish me to remain your wife, or to seem to be, and at the same time you wish to be all that you are to some one else?"

"It sounds preposterous, but I think that is what I mean. Is it possible?"

"I wonder. It is much to ask of me. You see, I do not understand what is left for me. There seems no importance to my place in such a triangle."

"Yes, there is. Both for you and me."

"I'm afraid I do not understand."

"It's hard for me to say it clearly, though I do feel it clearly. We are certain important things to each other—the things we have always been. It's just as though here were an area that represents us, and here beside it is a new area that represents—some one else. Neither actually intrudes on the other. They can co-exist if we will not allow conventional ideas and the opinions of others, who are nothing to us, to influence. We never have thought of the opinions of others. We have thought and felt and worked as we pleased. Let's not complicate this with any thought of what people say. If we can understand it, does it matter if no one else does? No one else is important to us, really."

"I wish I could believe it is as simple as—as your

diagram makes it." She smiled a little. The smile suddenly reestablished them more comfortably.

"It's a pity, isn't it," she went on, "that I don't care less about you, or that I don't care for some one else? It would be so simple then."

"Don't, Astrid, please."

"But I am serious."

"Let us try to see it as it is. You have a career. You are a busy woman, deeply interested in your playing. I have a career also. We are interested in each other's careers. We have helped each other to make these careers. We can always do that. Suppose she were no more than friend to me—nothing would be spoiled by such a relationship. It happens that she is more, but *concretely, practically*, it does not affect all of the carefully built-up relationship that exists between you and me. We haven't been exactly lovers in a long time. The warm, gracious, kindly love we have cannot be destroyed without doing serious damage to both of us. It need not be destroyed. After all, Leslie, too, is independent and goes her own way in the world."

"You have many words, Robert, and you disconcert and confuse me with them. Almost you are too, what do you say?—plausible. It does not seem right that you should be able to make all of this sound so reasonable. I think you do what the psychologists call rationalizing.

Please understand me, I am not belittling what you say. I believe you are sincere. But the very coolness of your good reasoning in a matter where there is so much passion, makes me distrust somehow—not you—but the seeming logic of what you say.”

“I’m not springing this on a moment’s thought. I have thought and thought and thought. I *do* see it this way. Am I so wrong, possibly?”

“If such a case were told to us about others, should we be able to see it as you wish me to see this?”

“If it were an affair of others, I should say it was none of our business. I should say if it pleases them, all right.”

“But there are a few people, dear friends and old friends—we must not suffer in their estimation.”

“There are very few—and I think they’ll understand. If they can’t, maybe they aren’t the kind of friends we want.”

“That sounds very young, and perhaps not so practical as I expect you to be. There is my own family, for example. We must not be ridiculous. Above all, Robert, I don’t wish you to appear ridiculous, ever. I have had too much pride in you.”

“Well, after all, it isn’t exactly public property. You are going abroad soon, and I had thought of going to Spain for a part of the winter.”



"Yes, I know. But we have acquaintances everywhere. You are an international figure. Oh, you know it isn't that I think it is of such practical importance! Your career is in no danger in any way. I wish only to save our pride in life—I suppose that is what I mean. I have not your talent for clear speech. I don't know—I am confused. I must have a little space to think."

She leaned forward and spoke with new earnestness. "These are questions of destiny. I know that they do not appear to be so to you, and I know that when you talk they do not even seem to be of great importance, but something tells me, something in here," she laid her hand on her heart, "tells me differently. I know that somehow all of our life is in this—yours and mine. I wish only to be wise and kind as possible. Just now I do not think I care greatly about justice as the world sees or understands justice, and you know very well that I do not really care about convention, or conventional right or wrong. My own feelings do not count, or what any one may think or say. I wish to be wise, and—and expedient. And for all of this I must think."

"And I know," Ives answered with an equal earnestness, "that however important as personal destiny all of it may seem to be to us, that it is less momentous, or threatening, than you think. Perhaps,

as the central figure, I should be better able to judge of this than any one. Even in talking with you it seems to assume different proportions—to be clearer, simpler, and somehow—workable.”

“You are reassuring, Robert, strangely reassuring, not so much in what you say, as in the way you say it, and by the look in your eyes. I already know that I cannot, must not, wholly lose you, but how we may arrange that I do not know. Let us not talk any more now.”

## IX

That night Ives slept heavily, dreamlessly—the drug-like sleep of escape which the intolerable sometimes brings to consciousness.

Astrid sat all night by her window, staring into the dark.

## X

The *Leviathan* was sailing at midnight. Brookes and Ives accompanied Astrid to the dock. There was still nearly an hour before they must say good-by. Ives had encountered some friends and was talking in the salon.

“Let’s get out of the crowd a moment, Astrid. I hate these steamer receptions.”

They stepped out on the glass-enclosed promenade.

"I'm sorry you're going. I'm going to miss you. But you'll be back in a short time. I hope everything goes splendidly, though I half wish you wouldn't do this concertizing."

"Why?"

"I don't know. You aren't of the breed. There isn't much of the showman in you, Astrid, and there has to be some of that for a spectacular success."

"You are encouraging! And on the eve of this tour which is really the beginning! I don't think, though, that I expect ever to make what you call a spectacular success."

"Why do you do it, anyway?"

"I must."

They watched the moving lights on the water for a few moments.

"My dear Brookes, you don't mean that you have old-fashioned ideas about careers for women, or anything like that? You know," she smiled deprecatingly, "they speak of me already as a second Teresa Carreño—which is very foolish. I do not play in the least in the manner of Carreño."

"And you aren't in the least like her. She was—well, something very different, to put it gently. I just don't like the idea of your playing in public—for the approval of any one. I resent it somehow."

"How very foolish. That isn't exactly the point of view."

"Anyway I don't quite see why you wish to do it. You have so much—"

"Have I?" she interrupted sharply.

He stared. "Yes. Haven't you? Hosts of friends everywhere, admirers of your playing, an interesting life—"

"One moment, my dear friend. I think I must play. I perhaps cannot make you see why. Only an artist understands that. But now, more than ever, I must play for my own sake."

"What do you mean—'now more than ever'?"

She laid both hands on his arm and spoke very quietly. "You see, Brookes, I know everything."

"You know—"

"About Robert and Miss Pell; yes. He told me several days ago. It is better that I should know. It is better that I should know from him. I knew something, anyway. I didn't know what. I was surprised. I am a little sorry that I must go and play just now, and yet I do wish to go away."

She turned her face again to the dark harbor flashing with a myriad lights. "But—I am afraid—I am so afraid, for the first time in my life."

"Frightened about your playing, you mean?"

"Yes, that, too, in a way. Just frightened, of everything—myself, life, for Robert—everything."

"Astrid, how much do you love Robert?"

"With all my heart."

"Good God!"

"You are surprised? You did not think so?"

"I thought perhaps you didn't. You see you were separated so much and so often. It looked—it all looked rather as though it were, or had become, Platonic."

"With him it had become so, I know that—now. It happened gradually. I hardly knew that we had become merely friends. We are not—even now," she spoke passionately, "we are more, but I—I don't understand. There is something more than friendship, or pity, in what he feels. I *do* believe that. And I had not really known, I think, of certain quiet deeps in me until they were stirred. It isn't—please, Brookes, reassure me a little!—it isn't that I'm just aroused by jealousy to a kind of possessive love, is it? I don't wish to be that sort of woman. I'm not jealous. From what I know of her, she seems—oh, I don't know and I don't care about her. That is of no consequence to me. I could give him up, and would, if I thought it best for him. I don't think it is best for him, and he doesn't want me to."

"What does he want you to do?"

"Nothing—just that. I must stand by—I shall stand by—so long as it is in any way important to him."

"But—"

"Don't be disturbed, or distressed, Brookes. Such problems cannot be solved in a day, or a week. There is time. But, you know, I am so strange to myself. You see, I must be able to understand myself and see myself first of all. That I cannot seem to do, certainly not at once. It has always been my pride, Brookes, that I have been so still inside—in here. You know, I talked to you not so long ago of it. Always I say to myself when things happen, be still, be still; and always I have done it well . . . All at once I find *I am something in the wind!*—no more than a leaf, or a piece of paper."

"Listen, Astrid. You know you can always depend on me, don't you?"

"How well I know it! I do depend on you. I—my dear, dear friend, because I know you love him, and are so faithfully his friend and my friend—I have been drawing on you like—like a bank account. I have found much courage in you this week that you did not know. It is you who are so still—you are a rock, too—you do not mind that I hold very tight?"

"I am happier than I can tell you, that you do. You can, always, you know."

"I know. I do know."

"I'm frightfully sorry, Astrid. I'm sorry for every one."

"It is strange, isn't it? I think I am, too. Even for myself—a little—and that isn't so good."

"Astrid, try not to blame him too much. It's just one of those damn things that happen. Life—"

"Surely you do not need to say that to me. I am somewhat versed in life myself—much more so than Robert is. Brookes, he *is* a great artist. As an artist he is immensely strong and independent—independent almost to isolation. Outside of that he is a dreamer—no more at home in the world than if he had just come into it. Genius is a strange thing. You will understand me, I know, when I say that genius is a selfish kind of thing. It consumes. Sometimes it consumes the one who possesses it, but more often it consumes others. It may be quite right. Genius is probably always worth all that goes to feed the flame. But it is an unconscious kind of selfishness. Robert is fundamentally kind. He has never been able to make others suffer. Always he has been, if anything, too kind to make advantage for himself. It is all of this that makes it necessary for me to stand by."

"But you—"

"I do not count in the scale. I made an agreement. I shall stand to that agreement as long as I can. Robert is more alone, perhaps, than most people guess. He is 'a solitary' as the critic Rinquet said of him. Never has he had any one really but you and me. We are certain things to him. You would not desert him because of—of Miss Pell. No more will I. Perhaps he needs her. She must be something to him that neither of us can be. For the time, for moments, I can think of myself not as a woman, not as his wife, but as a person, simply, who understands him well through—through affection, let us say, and long association. If he didn't need me in some way, or didn't care, or—"

"Or?"

"Or I cared much, very much for some one else, it would be very simple. We could rearrange matters, be friends, and all would be well. It is, maybe unfortunately, not so simple."

"Well, I think you are being magnificent."

"Not at all. It probably sounds much more noble than it is. Back of all I feel and do are many strange and complicated motives that I do not entirely understand myself. Sometimes I am quite simply a resentful woman. I never did any harm to any one, Brookes, that I know of. On the other hand I don't think any one



meant to do anything to me. It is simply as you say—one of those damned things that happen. But don't mistake—I am not being noble. Maybe at bottom I am acting selfishly. I only know that I am acting in the only way I can."

"I wish I could do something."

"There is much that you can do. You are remaining here. You will see him. Everything may not be easy for you—"

He turned a startled look toward her. "What do you mean?"

She seemed a little confused. "I mean nothing. Sometimes I speak stupidly. In excitement, my English is not clear."

"Don't talk nonsense. You always say what you mean."

"I mean nothing," she repeated.

## XI

The hubbub in the salon increased. Porters hurried along the promenade under staggering mounds of baggage. Astrid and Brookes walked up and down for a few moments without speaking.

"Anyway, Astrid, you know I am with you—I'm with you both, and *for* you, for you particularly—more than you guess."

"I think I do guess."

"Then it's not disloyalty to any one for me to say—just how much that is true."

"You need not say."

"Maybe I want to say—however useless it is. I think I see everything pretty clearly—Robert, and every one involved. I don't seem to be able to blame any one very much. I would do anything in the world I could for either of you—for you, because I do love you so much."

She lowered her head and did not answer.

"You don't mind, very much, my saying it, do you?"

"It was unnecessary." She held his arm again. "I am not stupid, Brookes. I know—I have guessed, a little, for a long time. I am sorry, and not sorry at the same time. It only makes me like you more that you can say it in this way—so simply. I wish you didn't—in the way you do. I cannot bear for you to be hurt in any way. Can we be the best of friends, anyway?"

"Certainly, Astrid. I'm not asking anything. I only wish to tell you how certain you may be that I, too, can stand by."

"My dear Brookes! I think you are very wise. I wish I were so wise, and kind, and so big a soul. You know," she stopped and held out both hands, "you know that all I have of warmest friendship I give you

—fully, fully. I am too deeply touched just now to speak. I am afraid I can't.”

They came out from the glass enclosure to open deck. Astrid drew her furs closely about her face. They leaned against the rail. Neither spoke. They were standing now where a black reach of water was visible. The tormented and twisted tides, cut in every direction by ferries, tugs, motor boats, was a seething phantasm of color. It was quite unlike water, suggesting rather the dark flux of emotions and passions in the deeps of a troubled soul.

What was she thinking as she stood so still with her eyes fixed on the macabre aspect of orange and crimson reflections on the oily black waves? Brookes would have given much to know. Did the turmoil of water and light offer a similitude of the dark confusion that had come upon her? Did it suggest to her, as it did to him, some violent dissolution from which a new stability, or a new pattern could form again only after long waiting?

She, too, wondered about him. Must every one be torn and wounded in these shifting relationships? Dear old Brookes, so kind and generous. A surge of anger shook her for an instant, and as instantly receded. There was no one against whom such a feeling might fairly be directed. A certain fatalism inherent in her

nature calmed her again. She was really eager to go. Tomorrow morning there would be wild, open sea. It would be good to look on the ocean again. It would be good to have the perspective that always came to her in the presence of the sea or the mountains. She was too close to all of this. The disturbing breath of unwonted passions blurred her usually clear vision, just as the steam and smoke from the group of tugs panting at the stern of the great liner obscured the outlines of buildings beyond.

"You give me much strength. I am glad to have talked with you."

"I hope I haven't spoiled anything."

"You mean—? But certainly not, Brookes."

He looked at his watch. "We'd better go in. Just a few minutes now."

She turned but remained standing where she was.

"One more thing I must say. I am going to do only what I think I must. I do not care what any one thinks. Many will believe I am foolish, I suppose. I must not care what is convention—strange, isn't it, that one constantly returns to these points of view? No one can ever arrange conventions that meet our own cases. I must have courage to do all that I believe. But I am not so independent that I do not wish some one to approve of me."

She held out her hand. "I say good-by to you now."

"Good-by, Astrid. Best luck. I shall hear from you directly?"

"Certainly. Good-by." Still she held back. "I almost wish I were not going. I have been alone much, but I have never felt alone before. This time the ocean seems very wide. . . . Come."

She took his arm and walked quickly forward. The shore signal for visitors was already sounding.

The next afternoon Ives received a note from Leslie.

ROBERT DEAR,—I am leaving today for Lenox to stay with Dad for a while—two or three weeks at least. I haven't been at home in more than two years. Dad and I seem to be better friends, really, than we ever have been. He wants me to come.

Anyway, you understand, I'd rather be away for a little while just now. I shall miss you and miss you and miss you. It is horrible when I don't see you every day. I love you—*too much*. Please write.

Always your own

L.

He folded the letter and placed it in the lacquer box where he kept the few notes she had written to him.

Leslie had a disconcerting way of making decisions

and acting quickly on them. He would miss her particularly, but he appreciated the tact of this move. He had been acutely uncomfortable about Leslie last night when he said good-by to Astrid on the *Leviathan*. Again he was grateful for the graceful timeliness of this visit to Lenox.

He began moving things about with a great show of energy and industry. He was thoroughly unhappy at the moment. It seemed as though everything inside of him had been removed. Body and mind felt empty and cold.

## XII

Leslie took the afternoon express. It was a relief somehow to feel herself borne rapidly through the leafless country. For a few hours there would be nothing to decide, nothing to do. It was the first release she had had in months. She turned her chair toward the window and watched the landscape slipping by like an endless film. There was no more color save here and there where a stubborn glow lingered near the ground in the scrubby oaks.

The Berkshires were indigo against a cobalt sky, then purple against peach, then black against a cold green. Still she strained her eyes through the reflected lights on the glass to see the solid reality of fields and rocks and trees.

She found herself saying Robert's name over and over, fitting the syllables to the rhythm of the clicking car wheels. Her thoughts fled backward—backward—as though struggling against the motion that carried her each moment farther and farther away. It seemed to her as though she were being physically racked by this stretching distance. Her loneliness was emphasized by every detail of her surroundings. The night streamed by the glittering windows like ink. There was not one person in this swaying car who knew her or cared about her. It was her world in miniature. Only Robert cared—she wondered just *how* he cared. But no matter—he cared. She would ask no questions. But outside of that little area which she could see was a world of utter blackness. She was being borne along as helplessly in the world as in this train.

There was scant comfort in the thought of her father. He wouldn't, of course, say "I told you so"—she wouldn't let him know anything he could say it about. But he would know, and be grimly silent. That would be harder for her than if he were triumphant. She wondered why she came. She only knew that she must go away for a while. There was nowhere else to go—no one to whom she could turn. She had not realized how desperately alone she was until yesterday.

There was not a person in all New York she felt free to visit for a single day.

A journey, however brief, always had a peculiar effect on Leslie. She experienced a complete detachment from all of the concerns of everyday life. It was as though she had been lifted outside of herself. The view she now had of herself and her circumstances was not reassuring. The one thing she demanded, the one thing she esteemed necessary to her existence, was freedom. Freedom, she began to realize, might prove to be something not only impossible, but actually undesirable. She had been free. For two years no one laid the slightest restraint on her. She had been able to think and feel as she liked, to come and go when she wished. All of that time she had been merely lonely. Now she was no longer free. She had reached out and taken something she had wanted. By taking it she had given herself to it. She had destroyed her freedom. She was a prisoner. The casual world of acquaintances had vanished. They had gone like the leaves from the trees.

Leslie had neither the experience, nor the resources to meet this as indifferently as older people could do. She was hurt. It would have been a relief to cry, but she never cried. Her characteristic stoical look stole over her face; but it was a whiter look than usual—an older, wearier look.



All of this had nothing to do with her essential happiness. Over and over she reassured herself on this point. There was Robert: she loved him. In that lay all of happiness that she wanted. It was a complete world. Only—

Only what? She wished she could be as sure of his happiness as of her own. There was no doubt in her mind of his love for her. Only—

Questions as persistent as the reiterated click-click of the car wheels, intruded themselves. Robert was not free in the same way that she was. Nothing could ever make him free. His interest in Astrid, his affection for her, the whole current of his sympathy, held a great part of him, perhaps a major part of him. She felt all of this sometimes—she felt his attention, his thoughts, his feelings like a wind blowing away from her. She could no more hold him at such times than she could hold the wind in her hands. All of his past life with another woman came between them. Even when he held her in his arms, it was there. It came between their lips like a hand. She wondered if he felt the same thing. This was her uneasiness. If he did, it was probable that he would not meet it as she was capable of meeting it.

Already the wild surge of her youthful possessiveness was being turned back on itself. She had had all of the natural impulse of a girl to say to herself, and to him,

that she must have everything or nothing. But even when she had talked to her father and had put her case, her claims, her hopes, so calmly, she knew that she must live up to the compromise she was declaring. It had been strange how her own words affected her that day. Many of her statements had surprised her no less than they had surprised him. Put into actual words, her rather nebulous thoughts had struck her with a force entirely new. Even as they were sounding on her ear she knew them to be her enemies. Also she knew, however hard it might prove to be, that she would live by them. She knew now that she could. But could Robert live by his compromise? Would Astrid permit it? Leslie knew that there must be no test of strength between them. She knew, too, that youth usually won. Matched equally, her youth and beauty might conquer everything. But it might not—most likely would not—against the past. That was not the point: *she did not want to win. To win would be to lose more than she could gain.* She wanted no contest as she hoped for no triumph. Robert loved her. She was sure of this. She loved him. She wanted him entirely. She would have been happy to sweep every other conflicting claim out of existence. But, since this could not be, she wanted only what belonged to that love. She was not clear here. She did not know what belonged to it, or to her.

She laid firm hands on her emotions. She had prided herself so on possessing a head. Where was it now? She had been so modern, so cynical, so wise. If the gains of her generation were ever to serve her, surely this was the moment.

A cold rigidity quelled the tumult in her brain. Whether it was fear, or caution, or courage, she could not determine. She only knew that it helped at the moment and that it was a respite and something of a comfort. She was ready now to face her father. She was even eager to see him. It would be a sort of test, and she wished to test herself. Life in the immediate future was going to require more courage than she had thought it would. Her father had displayed surprising tact. She wondered if it had been tact or restraint. Had he said what he really wished to say? She remembered that he had not spoken of right or wrong. Perhaps he knew that neither right nor wrong in any conventional sense could have any weight with her. . . . Right. Wrong. . . . She considered the words gravely as though they were terms from a foreign tongue. What did they mean, anyway?

She sighed and shifted her chair a little, propping her feet on the narrow ledge that ran along the side of the car. Her own thoughts were becoming tiresome. But it was useless to run away from one's own thoughts.

Right. Wrong. . . . Right or wrong could not exist absolutely. What was it she had read recently that made that quite clear? Of course. She knew herself a child in grappling with abstract morals. There might be for her—was, in all probability—an actual right or wrong. A course of action that had some imperative reason behind it. For her this might be very different than for any one else in the world. Her father did not think so. He had considered her as a member of society from which she could not separate herself. What held for society must hold for her. Maybe that was true about certain acts—stealing, or murder. But what she thought, or felt, or what she chose to do with her own self—her very body—surely she was free in that. Could there be any hidden force in conduct that could do anything to her or to Robert, or to her love? That was worth considering. It seemed like a superstition to think about it, but still—

She leaned forward and rested her head on her hand. Love—her feeling for Robert—this something that thrilled along her nerves and quickened her blood, this feeling that made her happy and miserable, and sometimes both, this, too, was real. It was more real, more tangible than the chair in which she was sitting. It was more important than any concrete thing. She had derided disapproval and social consequences because they

were not visible, concrete things. Yet the very love which was the most vital thing in the world to her was equally abstract.

She wished terribly that her mind were better trained. Doubtless all of this was the A-B-C of some sort of philosophy—ethics, or something like that. She returned stubbornly to the task of thinking. This was her puzzle and she must find her own way in it. . . . *Her puzzle?* The thought startled her. Two hours, or three hours ago, she would not have said to herself that she had a puzzle, or a problem. Where had her thought led her? What was this that had been uncovered? *Problem?* Surely she had none. She had led herself into a maze of moonshine and spooks! She scattered her thoughts like a flock of birds, but like a flock of birds they settled back again with the same fluttering disquiet.

Once more she began patiently the unaccustomed task of self-review and introspection . . .

She thought again of all that Robert had said. When he held her in his arms and talked to her she was quite happy. Maybe it wasn't anything he said. Maybe it was the touch of his hands, or the sound of his voice or the flame of his lips on hers—whatever it was, she knew no doubts at such moments. The distorting fears went like fog before a wind. But—

But away from him she was assailed from within and without. If only she could hear his voice for one moment with its calm reassurance. Strange that her faith and peace should rest on words. Words! What a frail bridge to carry so great a weight! What evil there was in them, and what strange good!

Leslie, like Robert—like every one else in the world, was learning the intolerable lesson of isolation. She felt walled in. She could not make any one know positively and absolutely what she felt and thought. She could only tell them. Nor could she *know* what Robert felt. She could only listen to his words and trust them. Across that appalling gulf between them there was no way of passage. There could be nothing but the invisible web of sound spun by words whose very connotations in the mind of another were uncertain. This kind of uncertainty was maddening. She decided, practically, that to think about it was unjust. She had no right to distrust the words of another. She expected others to believe that she meant all that she said, simply and clearly, in the only way that any one has of communication. She was becoming metaphysical again. This was all moonshine. Anyway, words had the support of deeds, of the look in one's eyes. Certainly, she was being a little absurd. The horrible, smothering unrest subsided a little. She leaned back in her chair,

worn by a struggle with shadows. A returning comfort relaxed her, and warmer thoughts laid their healing gentleness on her heart. Thought that was more dreaming than thought, began to mix pleasantly with physical sensation. She dozed a little, and the click of the car wheels took up again the reiteration of a name. The pulsing repetition seemed to be the very beating of her heart, inseparably a deep and living part of her, so long as life should be.

## XIII

"Good night, Ellen." Brookes reached the door and turned back. "By the way, Leslie left town. She's gone up to Lenox for a visit."

"Really? When did she go?"

"Today."

"Well, isn't that—"

"Isn't it what?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Well, I think it was a tactful and fine thing for her to do."

"She's cleverer than I thought."

"Clever? I don't see anything particularly clever about it."

"No, I suppose you don't. Robert probably wouldn't either."

"Ellen, you're incomprehensible. I think that Leslie felt it was an obviously decent and graceful and sportsmanlike thing to do. Astrid—"

"It tells me more about her than anything I've heard yet. Don't you see that if Leslie had stayed in New York this week that Robert's mind would have been filled with Astrid? Leslie knew that. He might have had an attack of conscience. By placing herself in the same case—"

"Ellen, that's an unjust thing to come from you."

"It's tactful, Brookes; but it is also extremely clever."

"All right, Ellen. Have it your way; but I think you're being unkind. Leslie isn't calculating in any way. She may have sensed that Astrid would be somewhat on Robert's mind just now and didn't wish to be an intrusive factor. But as for being clever—I don't think she'd bother about it."

Ellen smiled.

#### XIV

The ensuing days passed aridly for Ives. Nothing interested him. He reviewed his pictures with an active distaste. The studio was unbearable. Everything in it was clamorous of Leslie. The house uptown was equally so of Astrid. He passed long hours trying to read. The theater proved a bore. Sometimes he found himself



filled with rage at the circumstances of life. He could not understand how all of this had come about. The beginning had been so simple—so innocent, even—and the present was so complicated. He could not believe that it was really his fault. It seemed somehow the fault of others. No one was willing, seemingly, to try to see from his viewpoint. A childish egotism and a childish resentment distorted his thinking beyond all coherence. He was incredibly naïve in all of this. The spoiled child that he had been, the petted and humored boy, the self-centered artist whose way had always been made easy—these and the predatory male that is in every man came suddenly to the surface and combined to destroy his social normalcy.

He had become so accustomed to Astrid through the quiet years. She had been like a friendly landscape, or the sky. That there could be change, or the possibility of change there, that she might choose to arrange her life in accord with ideas different from his own, was so startling that he was hurt. It was this simplicity and naïveté that Astrid understood so well. It was just this that stayed her decision, and that made it possible for her to think of some sort of compromise. She saw how hurt he was at her inability to see eye to eye with him. She held her pride in submission and checked quick

words on her lips when she saw how unexpected they would have been to him, and how incomprehensible.

Ives was bewildered—bewildered by the sudden breaking of conflicts about his head, and stupefied by the conflicts within. He knew himself definitely pulled in two directions. The oppositions of his interests and emotions tore him like a rack. All at once he came out from the dream world of the artist, from the mystery and enchantment of his peculiar kind of feeling, into a harsh and stark reality. It was the agony of birth.

Any hint of threat against the freedom of his relationship with Leslie sent him into a cyclone of resentment and protest. Leslie was sheathed with his very nerves. To lose her would be a kind of destruction of some essential part of himself.

He wondered, as he walked up Park Avenue in the clear twilight, why he was thinking of such a possibility. There was nothing that threatened the loss of her. There was, in fact, every reason to feel more comfortable about her than he had at any time. Astrid knew: and there was nothing critical, or violent, to come from Astrid. It was soothing to his sense of propriety, even though subtly surprising, that there had been, and could be, no distasteful scenes. Astrid was always a great lady. Both Astrid and Leslie belonged to a world which recognized the obligations of breed-

ing. Whatever adjustments must be made in the future were sure to be consonantly made.

Why, then, was he being fearful this evening when his mental sky should be as clear as that apricot and blue arch over the wide avenue? The self-addressed question failed of rhetorical effect. He felt threatened. He was threatened, he felt sure, by forces in the organized world that he had never so much as thought of. Among his acquaintances there was a buzzing of gossip. He knew of it. What subtle powers of disintegration might lie in such trifles were unguessable. Thank God he would go away soon—as soon as the early winter exhibition took place. He had promised to stay for it. The thought of escape from New York gave but momentary relief. There were the same kind of people everywhere; and wherever he might go he would carry with him the insoluble problems and irreconcilable antagonisms of his own heart.

Lines from a ghastly poem he had read once came into his mind—

There is a death that has to do  
With leather thongs and small white ants.

That was it. He was staked down and attacked by a multitude of invisible enemies.

The morbid train of thought was unbroken when he let himself into his house half an hour later.

He dreaded the evening. Dinner at Marcia Deering's, and Mrs. Selfridge's party afterward where there would be music. He would be poor company for any one tonight.

## xv

The unique charm of Marcia's house laid an instant calm on him. It was one of the few houses he had seen in New York that was not done in the characterless monotony of Italian or Spanish style. The rooms were a pleasantly varied sequence of uncontrasted colorings with furniture that made no pretense to periods. Everything had been selected in accordance with a highly personal taste. The result was an atmosphere rather than a spectacle. Ives felt himself enveloped in a subtle harmony deriving from a personality. The interest of the house did not lie in a decorative scheme. One felt that the beauty and richness of the surroundings would only come to full expression in the presence of its creator. This, he thought, is what a house should be, a setting, not a picture.

He considered the gracious arrangement that lent to intervening spaces the very eloquence of pictures, the lighting that was placed to accent and enhance certain objects, the skillful *sforzati* of brilliant Chinese vases

that brought color groupings to effective culminations, and the adroit effect of flow that led the eye through cadences of line to prearranged conclusions.

The entire house laid a quieting hand on his querulous unrest, and he sank into a chair with the first feeling of escape that he had had in many days.

When Marcia entered he recalled Brookes' gay banter. She had again the air of gallant adventure that had so engaged his imagination on first seeing her.

Throughout dinner he had the comforting feeling of being in his own world and in companionship with some one who understood every nuance of his thought. Mr. Deering had been called to Baltimore in the afternoon, and Ives, always at his best when other men were not present, expanded brilliantly. The two were in a mood of high gayety when they left for Mrs. Selfridge's musicale.

A few people were standing about in the great Caen stone hall talking. The contrast between Marcia's house and this one was interesting. Despite the splendor of tapestried walls and twinkling chandeliers and superb antique furniture, it was a soulless place. The numerous servants in gray and silver livery moved like specters.

Mrs. Selfridge received in the ballroom—a huge

green and crystal apartment that occupied the top floor. She was a woman of perhaps fifty with close-cut white hair. Her face was as clear and cold as a cameo. She was gowned in silver lace and wore magnificent emeralds. Her invitation lists represented the last word in exclusiveness.

Mabry arrived a few minutes later looking exceptionally well. While Ives was talking to her he was astonished to see Leslie come in with Marie Vreeland, a niece of Mrs. Selfridge.

"I didn't know Leslie had come back."

"Came this afternoon. I wired her. Wanted to see her. Come on, I must speak to Sarah van Ruyn. Isn't she frightful-looking?"

Mabry beckoned to Leslie and crossed the room to greet the older woman. The two presented a piquant contrast. Mrs. van Ruyn, stolid, frumpish and dull, bore herself with a stony assurance. Mabry, smartly dressed, regarded the other with an impudent amusement in her quick, intelligent eyes.

"Sarah, I think you don't know my niece, Leslie. Dombey's daughter, you know."

Mrs. van Ruyn's blunt fingers moved along her lorgnette chain. It was the gesture of a tribal chieftain reaching for a tomahawk; but something in Mabry's

eyes arrested the movement and the glittering implement swung harmlessly. She muttered an acknowledgment.

“—And Mr. Robert Ives you know.”

Mrs. van Ruyn extended her hand. Mabry laughed a little enigmatically and launched into an account of her South American trip. Ives and Leslie exchanged conventional salutations in a low voice, but Mabry held them to her audience.

The four remained standing in the middle of the room until Mabry was sure they had been generally seen. Then she linked arms with Mrs. van Ruyn and led her to a seat near the piano. Leslie, with evident reluctance, followed and Ives rejoined Marcia. If Marcia observed Mabry's carefully staged little comedy, she gave no indication of it.

At that moment the picturesque Mrs. Hirsch made her entrance. Ives remembered her from the night of Mabry's box party at the début of the Spanish disease. She had already reached Mrs. Selfridge's list of election. There would be but few more steps to make. She was gowned in a magnificent gold brocade and was easily the most astonishing person in the whole room. She bowed cordially as she passed Mabry and Sarah van Ruyn. This time the latter's lorgnette went up.

"Too bad," Ives thought. "She won't get that dinner invitation this season."

Marcia's noncommittal gaze followed Mrs. Hirsch down the long room. It was a beautiful progress. One almost waited for a ripple of applause.

"Ornamental, isn't she?"

"And interesting," Ives added warmly. "Is she as intelligent as she looks?"

"Quite. She has a distinguished literary taste, she is musical, and she is a gifted linguist."

"Then why, in Heaven's name, does she aspire to this rather dull society? She could gather about her people who would be interesting. What does she want with this? In America where there is no court to head society I should think interesting individuals would prefer making their own sets and not struggle into ready-made groups where they aren't wanted and where they won't be happy when they arrive."

"But Ada Hirsch will enjoy blocking some one else's progress."

"I thought you said she is intelligent."

"That has nothing to do with intelligence, Robert. That's nothing more than the exercise of human nature."

"I don't understand your American social conditions."



"It isn't necessary to understand them, but it's easy to enjoy them if you have a sense of humor."

He smiled and surveyed the room once more. Mrs. Selfridge, with full prerogatives of exclusiveness, was apt to exercise her powers of selection with the triumphant freedom of a perfect personal security. This was particularly true of her musical evenings.

Two expressions predominated in the countenances of her guests. A portion wore the restful smugness of a runner who has finished a good race, but touched with a faint anxiety that the decision might be contested. The others looked out from a comfortable and long-established arrangement with suspicion at the amazing thought of an increased population of the sacred precincts.

Mrs. van Ruyn studied the engraved program casually with the comfortable assurance that she would not be called upon to listen to anything not tried in the crucibles of social acceptability. Her assurance was justified. The singer, a titled Russian, turning his drawing-room talent to commercial advantage, had made an exquisitely snobbish selection of modern French songs.

"A whole evening of these moonlight and pastel French songs wearies me," remarked Mabry. "There isn't an honest emotion in one of them. Funny how a singer with very little voice always picks on 'em. This

Prince—what's his name? Can't read it—print's too small. Have you heard him?"

Mrs. van Ruyn was broadly and deeply ignorant of everything pertaining to music. She declined the technical issue.

"I knew his uncle in Petersburg when my brother was stationed there. Charming man."

The singer began. After the first song, done in exaggerated style, Mabry surreptitiously removed her ear piece and sat in the bliss of perfect silence.

#### XVI

Leslie sat motionless throughout the program. Her normal pallor was blanched to a dead white by the anger that turned her to ice. Had she had the slightest inkling of Mabry's intention to exhibit her with all of the implications of approval, and force something of this approval from others, she would not have come. Her indifference to anything Mabry's friends might feel—approval or disapproval—deepened to a very ferocity of scorn. Only one thing in the world mattered.

The singer had reached a group of Fauré. The artificialities of his beginning fell away. He was better than Mabry had thought. The moods of dream, of tenderness, of longing, of exquisite proud regrets, touched Leslie and restored her to herself.

Under cover of the polite applause she glanced in Ives' direction. He was talking animatedly to Marcia. She knew that expression and manner of his so well—his quick, warm appreciation, increased by sharing it with some one. She knew that he was living for the moment in that lively world of feeling and fancy that was so vital to him. That any one else should be a part of it, for the smallest moment, sent a wild pang through her. She sensed his spirit and imagination in full flight. A deep, instinctive distrust of Mrs. Deering asserted itself.

She had again that humiliating glimpse of herself as only a small part of his extensive and complex world. He had so many years' advantage of her. No matter how much she might travel, or how many people she might meet, or how many great books she might read, he would always be ahead of her—twenty years ahead. There was Mrs. Deering meeting him on his own ground—actually disagreeing with him sometimes—and so lightly, so easily. Now they were speaking German; she particularly hated that. If they would only speak French, she wouldn't even be interested in what they might be saying. Her own French was better than Mrs. Deering's. That, at least, had been one delightful experience—to find that her excellent French pleased him. He was really more at home in French than in Eng-

lish. It was enchanting to have him make love to her in French. Tonight, in this company of older people, she hated being young. People were always talking about youth as though it were something priceless, something to be held to, and to be regretted when it lessened. One was only horribly sensitive, and self-conscious—raw everywhere, and awkward. There was so much social jugglery, so much deft technique of intercourse, that made one agreeable and comfortable: all of that could only come with many years of practice. The way Mrs. Selfridge came in and sat down when the program began. It was superb. Only to fold a fan and place it so in one's lap was a triumph. Her own set of young friends . . . they were slouchy in such details. The older people they so often jeered had refinements in undreamed-of minutiae. Thank Heaven she didn't blush—and she could hold still. She didn't care what they thought of her. Probably no one was noticing her at all. She hoped so. Old Mrs. van Ruyn—she took a malicious pleasure in so designating her—certainly didn't like her, or approve of her. Horrid old woman . . . looked as though she were attacked by some sort of dry rot . . . stupid . . . what virtue could there be in winning her approval? A furious disgust assailed her. At the same time she felt a mad joy in her own fresh youth, in her firm young body all

creamy and softly curving under her clothes. A crazy tingling ran over her when she thought of it. Robert loved her. She had this to give him—the whole orchard-sweet delight of her. The distracting beat of her blood stilled again. All of her sophistication told her how fleeting such attractions might be, how tenuous their hold, how brief their moments. Men drank thirstily enough of such draughts, and then thought of something else—a cigarette, or a drink, or a newspaper. Maybe Robert wasn't like that—not too much—he was a poet-soul with a divine gift of glorifying his emotions and his experiences. Such differences might not go deeper than the thin veneer of civilization. She was beginning to know how thin that veneer could be. Even her father—how wise he really was, and what wonderful long talks they had had in which he talked to her as to another man, until she was more pleased and flattered than she had ever been in her life—even her father had said that she was extremely civilized, and now at this minute distressingly primitive impulses steamed through her brain. Echoes, uncertain fragments, of the talk between Mrs. Deering and Robert reached her. They were talking about music—Schönberg—that much she understood. Music, of which Robert knew so much, and she nothing at all. Perhaps Mrs. Deering knew a great deal about it. And Astrid

Borg—who played so well. Every one said she was a really great pianist. Music must be very important to him. It must furnish a whole world of references, touch-stones, allusions, values. It was a great section of his vocabulary that was incomprehensible to her. But even this was little compared to his painting. Others understood his work. She did not. It was largely without meaning. She had looked very hard at it, watched it grow. He didn't even trouble to explain it to her. When she spoke of it, or expressed any preferences, he looked at her oddly as though he were not listening—the way one looks pacifyingly at a child. The other day she had heard him quote a line from a new book. He had read it aloud to her:

“An apple by Cézanne is of more consequence artistically than a Madonna by Raphael.”

She knew by the sudden flush that rose to his cheeks that he was pleased and excited by the sentence. She had gone that day to the Metropolitan Museum to see something of Cézanne. She had found a still life with a basket of apples—the very one reproduced in the book. She had studied it a long time. There was some secret there, something on canvas that was of importance to Robert. If she could see it—if she could so much as like it, it might represent a bond between them . . . if she could feel it, it would be a bond of some kind. She

felt baffled. The canvas was rather dull. She couldn't even see the "luminosity" Robert had mentioned. The apples were solid and lumpish-looking. The picture seemed to glower back at her eager, searching gaze. It defeated her. She was terribly discouraged. If something in Cézanne's apples was so enormously important, it should be at least somewhat obvious—certainly to so anxious a scrutiny as hers. If it were something so subtle that only artists could perceive it, surely it could not be so important. Maybe art existed at its best only for artists. Still it couldn't be so significant if . . .

She floundered a little there. She wouldn't dare say these things to him. Perhaps he could make it all clear in a few sentences, but he might be amused by her lack of cleverness. His wit was so agile, so terrifyingly adept, on these slippery high places.

She had stopped to look at the big Raphael. Certainly she didn't like that either. It was pleasant to look at, but the figures and faces were as unreal and bloodless and far away as those remote days when it was painted. She thought the Madonna rather simpering and unintelligent-looking. The whole arrangement meant nothing to her. It gave her no feeling of the holiness it was supposed to represent, no tenderness, no awe. On the whole maybe she did like Cézanne's apples better. That gave her a little feeling of relief.

Maybe it was a hopeful sign. She went back to see the Cézanne again. There were others that she had not noticed before. One, a bare hill, she liked. She could walk on such a hill. But another, a wooded slope, was ugly. The trees looked like a wash of blue ink. No . . . there was no nearer approach to Robert through these things. Did Mrs. Deering like Cézanne, and understand him? Did she perhaps *say* she did? . . . Now she was being mean. There was no use deceiving herself: she was jealous! A rush of feeling distorted her groping imagery—the way heat waves confuse a distant landscape. It would be hideous if she gave way to this.

The company was drifting down the columned stairway to the dining room. Not many were left. Marie had disappeared. Mrs. Hirsch floated by like a gold cloud. She smiled and bowed. Her ripe, fruit-like beauty was stabbing. How really splendid she was! There was something fabulous about her—like Jeritza in *Turandot*. She must be as fascinating as she looked, thrilling and mysterious. What a wonderful thing it would be to look like that—be like that, and stand before the man you loved in such transporting loveliness: what a sense of fulfillment to know that you were all that dreams could desire!

But Robert must have seen and known a great many



wonderful women, and he had wanted her. Perhaps he was investing her with the magic of his imagination. His fancy was more fabulous than any reality—that she knew. He could make her anything—anything he wished; and he must wish her to be the most wonderful things because he loved her. That vast, teeming region of his imagination—there was something princely about its richness. That showed in his every look. How much more he looked it than the real Prince there in the doorway talking to Mrs. Selfridge. He was really hers. He had held her close in his arms, kissed her, and said the most extravagant things to her. Her eyes swam a little as she looked at him still immersed in discussion with Mrs. Deering.

The room was almost empty now. Mrs. Selfridge saw her standing alone where Mabry had left her, and beckoned with her fan.

“Miss Pell, aren’t you coming down to supper? Come here, let me introduce you. Marcia, Mr. Ives: shall we go down?”

## XVII

Leslie lived through agonies of conflicting emotions for the next three weeks. She was unable to deny to herself that she was disturbed by Mrs. Deering, but nothing could have forced a word of it from her. Ives spoke of Mrs. Deering frequently but the candour of

these casual references allayed her fears for only so long as he was speaking. Immediately she would be assailed by shattering jealousies. Mrs. Deering was undoubtedly a woman who could be very dangerous. She possessed qualities that might enchain far less sensitive men than Ives. Whether she would make the slightest effort to do this, or to act upon such a contingency, was another matter. Leslie felt that Mrs. Deering was too superior to flirt, or to play with the interest she might arouse in men. Yet she distrusted her. In cooler moments she decided that she distrusted her influence and her power, but not her motives or her conduct.

Leslie had the not unusual feminine trait of being able to see clearly and judge fairly, and at the same time to maintain a prejudiced distrust. She was certain that Mrs. Deering usurped nothing of Ives that belonged to herself; but she was illogically jealous of the older woman's sophisticated charm, and disliked her accordingly.

She said to herself again and again that nothing could be farther from her wishes than to disturb Ives' work, or to lessen his absorption in it. She knew that his very life derived from it. But she had come to dread those long hours when he was lost to everything but the canvases before him. When the light failed in

the afternoon he would turn to her with a look of half recognition as though he had come from a long journey and was uncertain of her identity. Then almost immediately he would be his gay self again and her troubled mind smoothed. Sometimes he played with her as with a child. He invented games, and fabricated mock languages. He mimicked acquaintances and drew the most astonishingly comical caricatures. A particularly amusing one of Marcia Deering she kept. It was one of her chief reassurances.

He could be superbly nonsensical, and at such times all of her fuming and uncertainties vanished like a breath.

Then there were terrible days when Astrid haunted her. The possessive hand of the woman who had known him so long, followed his every thought, and influenced him in a thousand ways, became almost palpable. It delayed her step, stopped her hand, and held her lips from him. Astrid, Marcia Deering, his painting: what was she alone in the scale against these? His painting: an all-absorbing fever that seized him and held him with demoniacal power—lifting him out of the world into a place where she could not follow. It tormented her to think that perhaps Astrid *could* follow him there. Perhaps he missed Astrid terribly—needed her just there. It might even be that Mrs. Deering with her

subtlety could companion him on these excursions of the spirit. She felt heavy, earthy. This flesh, beautiful as it was, held her back. So much of the time she was maddened by sheer physical want of him. Unforgettable phrases from that first talk with her father persisted like the chanting of an infernal mass. "*What you have will seem nothing: you will want more and more of him.*"

At times she would set herself in sharp competition with everything that made his life. She was young, intelligent, energetic. She would do something that would interest him, set her in the ranks of those whose achievements he respected and admired. But the way to achievement was long and difficult. By that time she might have lost him. There was nothing quick and easy. The beginnings of any study, any art, were so discouraging.

She read furiously and matched her opinions against critical reviews. It was encouraging. She felt books correctly. She found criticisms agreed with what she thought. She brought him the results of her reading. She was even a little pedantic. But Ives was not interested in books in that way. He read at a dash. He seemed to leap into books and tear the heart out of them. He gleaned at one glance what he wanted from them and rejected all that was not in harmony with

himself. He talked brilliantly of books, but they seemed to be no more than starting points for him. With a paragraph, or a sentence, he would fling open gates of speculation, poetry—fascinating, varied talk that enthralled her at the very moment that it cast her into frightful discouragement.

She decided that she would write. She would tell her own story. There was everything real in her experience—love, terror, the agony of violently contrasting moments of elation and depression. It would be a kind of testimony. It would serve to fix the very thing that seemed so unseizable, so fleeting, so protean. On paper it would have the conviction of concrete reality.

The moments of joy and satisfaction were so poignant—they taxed her nerves and imagination to the breaking point—and at the same time so evanescent that she felt the necessity of holding them in some less treacherous medium than memory. If she could record anything of them, it would be a kind of crystallization of time itself. She could turn the pages backward and live again in perfect hours. It would serve to reassure her in times when he was lost to her: it would be a weapon to rout the specters of uncertainty. It would establish her right to love. Robert would be able to see her as she could not tell herself to him.

Hers was the tragic earnestness of youth beating bruised hands against the doors of dividing years, demanding place in the freemasonry of experience.

## XVIII

She wrote feverishly. But her emotions were like a flock of wild and furious birds. They defied the tedious caging of language. The incoherent, fragmentary rhapsodizing that went down on paper represented nothing to her. Words no more held her heart than a sieve holds water.

She was denied the precious anodyne of work. Defeated in efforts to find something tangible to hold to, she was turned back on faith in those moments when all the troubling world fell away from her and left her alone with Robert in the piercing beauty of a requited devotion and an answered passion. At such times she came into complete realization of all she hoped and wished. Questioning was stilled, and she rested happily on the illusion of certainties.

## XIX

One night, unexpectedly, she began to cry. Every reserve went down suddenly. She felt herself stripped bare of all guards. A shaking terror destroyed every control.

Ives was shocked. She held to him with desperate hands.

"Robert, I must know what I am to you, and what you are to me. I must know what is mine and what isn't. I must know what to expect."

"Why, Leslie, what do you mean? What is the matter? I don't understand you."

She shook his arm violently. "Oh, you must understand! I don't know where I am. I thought somehow that you belonged to me as I belong to you. I know now that you do not. Don't you see that I must be certain of *something*? I love you, I love you, I love you so! There must be some part of you, some part of your life that is mine—just mine. I must know what it is. I have to protect myself from suffering. I have hurt too much these past days. I suppose I have fooled myself. I believed too much. Don't you see if I can only know what I have for my own, I shall not endanger that by expecting more? Then I can protect that, and try not to want anything else. Don't imagine that is easy. It isn't."

"Leslie, this is—"

"Don't, don't! Be patient with my youth at least. I want you completely. I was so silly to suppose that I could be satisfied with less. I will do with less, but I don't want to. I thought I could rely on my pride,

that it would always stand by me. But *I am bankrupt*, Robert, completely bankrupt of all that. I have to fight with myself not to beg you to leave everything and everybody and go away, forever, with me. The only reason I don't is because I think you can't. You don't want to. You wouldn't be happy; and I know I couldn't be, finally, if you weren't. But I want you to say—this is yours, Leslie, and this, and this—I must have something sure to hold to.”

“Leslie, dear, I love you. Surely you know that. I thought you understood that, and believed it—knew it. What has upset you? What could have happened to make you uncertain of anything? Has any one been talking to you?”

“No one. No one—” She felt hysteria clutching at her throat. She tried vainly to restrain the words of bitter, humiliating truth that came of their own volition. “—She’s had so much of you: years and years of you. She has so much. She has friends and fame: I have nothing—nothing in the world but you. She doesn’t love you as I love you: I don’t believe she ever loved you as I do. If I thought, or knew that you love any one else in the way you love me, I’d let you go—I’d *make* you go! I’d run away from you so fast and so far—” What was she saying? She hadn’t meant to say any of this. She hadn’t known that she thought



it. Something was in possession of her: something was speaking for her. She felt herself receding a little, drawing back, from the person who was speaking. Something that had been hidden and silent in the deepest, most secret place of her, had declared itself. These thoughts had been brewed in long hours of pain and wonder. They surprised her. They were at once familiar and strange. She heard her own choked voice continue . . .

He looked in deep dismay at her ravaged face, at her wide eyes where her naked soul stood in terror. A pity, almost too keen to be borne, possessed him. What had he done? What had he invoked?

"But I will do what she wouldn't do—what no one else would do, because I love you so. I'll take what I may have and try to be content. Only—"

"Only what, Leslie?"

"Only I must know *what* it is. I've been so uncertain."

"But, Leslie, I don't understand. You've been uncertain of what? You know that I love you. It seems to me that answers, or should answer, every question."

"Don't misunderstand me, Robert. I don't think that you want me just because I'm a girl that you can have. There must be plenty of them who are as—as accessible

as I have been, and who would have given you less trouble—would have been less exacting. I know that the way I love you is a trouble to you. You didn't expect it. I think you believed that I would be—oh, just a little girl who could be loved and petted and set aside until next time."

"That's unjust, Leslie."

"Oh, I hope it is. I want you to convince me that I am unjust, suspicious, petty, jealous—everything that isn't noble or nice. What I would have left would be just what I want—the assurance that I'm worth bothering about."

"Leslie, dear, I can't say—I don't know how to say just whatever it is you need to comfort, or reassure you, because I don't know what is back of this. I've never seen you like this. I *don't* know what to say. I can only say, over and over again, I love you."

"Maybe that is what I want you to say. Maybe if you will say it often enough, I'll be content."

"Leslie, dear, listen. We've never talked very much about her. As I wrote you, I told her. She is making the same compromise you are making. I am embarrassed that any one must make a compromise in my behalf. I don't feel that I am worth it. It seems to set some sort of value on me that, as I said, embarrasses

me. It makes me feel a little ridiculous. But she has not said one word of blame, nor suggested that I should give you up. She offered to go away—”

“But you don’t want her to?”

“I must be honest with you, dear. I don’t know how to make myself comprehensible to you—but I—I don’t want that to happen. It must not be—for every one’s sake.”

She kept her eyes fixed on his as though she were searching for something she must find. She seemed to be trying to tear the words out of him. She waited to brush aside his equivocal temporising phrases. She was directed at the very heart of their relationship. Ives felt awkward and inadequate. He had been totally unprepared for such a storm. He felt that he must answer her frantic importunity. Easy sophistries came to his lips but he denied them utterance in the face of her sincerity and utter need.

“I’m not trying to make a scene, Robert. I know men hate scenes. Listen, Robert. Suppose I told you that you must make a choice—between the two of us?”

“You wouldn’t do that, Leslie. You know the situation too well. I couldn’t.”

“But you would; and I know what the choice would be. You’d choose her. You’re right, I wouldn’t ask you. I know too bitterly well what the consequence

would be. But suppose *she* asked you to choose—told you that you must?”

“I couldn’t.”

She laughed, a little wildly. “I see, Robert; I see. I suppose I know where I stand. Now I won’t do this again.”

“But, Leslie—”

“Please—please, don’t! You’ll say something you don’t mean, just because you’re sorry for me. Don’t say anything. I know what I wished to know. Come on—I’m going to make cocktails. First, I’ll wash my face. I’ve made myself ugly. You’ve never seen me cry before, have you? I don’t do it often. I wonder what I was crying about.”

Her laugh sounded harsh. It struck Ives more deeply than her tears had done.

## XX

There was a note of consternation in Astrid’s report of her tour; and there was consternation in Ives’ heart for her when he read her letters. The tour was not going well. She was playing badly, very badly, she said; and a few of the critics had been quite outspoken about it. Others had passed her over with slight mention. He found it hard to believe that it was as bad as she said. She had been playing magnificently. Critics

had said—oh, surely, she was just being overwrought. It could not possibly be going so badly. Why should it? She had felt most optimistic before she sailed. But if she felt so about it, it was serious nevertheless. He knew what a failure of this tour would mean to her. He spoke to Brookes about it.

“Yes, I know,” Brookes replied. “I had a letter from her day before yesterday.”

“Yes? You did? Just what did she say about it?”

“Probably just what she told you. She said she was not playing well and that she was disappointed.”

“I can’t believe it. She must be exaggerating. Nerves, or something. But she isn’t much given to nerves.”

“Or to exaggerating.” Brookes’ tone was a trifle dry.

“No, I know. I can’t understand it. She gave you no details?”

“Nothing, I’m sure, that she didn’t write you.”

But Astrid had written in considerable detail to Brookes.

### XXI

The critics are saying the truth, Brookes. I am playing badly. The conductors are frankly disappointed, and I am more terribly disappointed than I can tell you. Last week at Amsterdam *I forgot* in the first movement of the concerto. Oh, you maybe do not know what that means to an artist! I am coming before my public, already somewhat known by

report, as a mature and seasoned pianist. I have done amateurish things that I cannot understand. I don't know how some of them have happened. It is just as though I had been turned backward ten or fifteen years. I am not mistaken, Brookes; *I know*. I had a very frank talk with Mengelberg after the Amsterdam mishap. An intelligent audience like that of the Concertgebouw could easily understand and pardon a slip that was quickly recovered. But I played like a frightened student afterward.

The tour should be canceled, but it does not seem possible, and the bad beginnings *have made me lose courage*. I am afraid. I suppose I was afraid before I left. You remember? I told you. Not too much of this to Robert, please! I have written him something, but not all of this. There is no use in disturbing him about it. Maybe, after all, I shall improve.

## XXII

Ives looked worried. "When are you going over, Brookes? Didn't you say you had to go abroad in a week or two?"

"I'm sailing Saturday: *Berengaria*. I expect to be in Paris the fifteenth and sixteenth. Then I have a few days. My London business can't be attended to until the twenty-second."

"Let me see: I have Astrid's schedule in my pocket. Um-m. She'll be in Cologne on the nineteenth. That would be perfect. Why can't you go up and see her?"

It would cheer her and encourage her enormously. I'll cable her tonight. She'll feel better right off, knowing you are coming."

"Well, I had already thought of it. When I had her letter—same time you had yours, I suppose—I cabled her through Hansen that I'd be over. Thought I'd want to see her anyway and particularly so under the circumstances."

"Oh, did you? That's fine, Brookes. It'll do her a world of good just to know you're coming. She's terribly fond of you, and I can't think of anything she'd like better than seeing you just now. I can't get away from here until late January. Tied up all sorts of ways. I've been planning Spain, you know. I suppose I'll be going on just about the time she comes back for the American tour."

Ives talked on, rather rapidly, about the plans of the Spanish sojourn. The moment passed when Brookes could say naturally that Astrid had cabled in reply that she would see him in Paris: a part of her tour had been rearranged. There was no secret about it. Doubtless Astrid would mention it in her next communication to Ives; but somehow it did not say itself readily.

Ives continued, but Brookes was not listening. He

flicked the ashes from his cigar and spoke casually.

"Leslie is going with you?"

Ives did not answer for a full minute. Both men looked steadily at each other. There was no embarrassment in the mind of either. Ives' eyes veiled slightly, but his glance probed a little anxiously. Never had the perfect understanding between them been so manifest.

The answer came naturally in an unchanged tone. "She's coming over on a later boat. I believe she's going to Paris for a fortnight, and expects to join me in Seville."

"And you are leaving—?"

"Toward the end of January, maybe earlier if I can manage it."

"I'm sorry you're going back to the other side, old man. I had hoped America would be the permanent thing."

"Not for me, Brookes. I'm European now: I am at home there in every way. America gave me a thrill, but it didn't last. It's a country I simply don't understand. There is something so heterogeneous and disordered about it. Its ideas are the same. I don't know what America is, what it thinks, or believes, or what it stands for; and I can't rest in that kind of a society. I feel



as though I were living in a half-built house—in the midst of thunderous construction and constant change of plan.”

“Yes, I daresay it is much like that. I’m used to it. All the same I wish you were staying here. There’s the country—”

“As bad as the town. I think I don’t like the raw newness of things. I may run down to New Orleans before I leave. But I know what it’s like: I remember, Charleston’s the same. The little mellowness they have acquired through the years is at best a poor imitation of finer old places abroad, and even that is broken by spots of aggressive ‘improvement.’ The most characteristic spots I know about are little villages in New England. But I’m not stressing picturesque appearances in the conventional sense of the word. Heavens above, there is nothing more spectacular than New York! And the whole country is dynamic to a degree—at least I suppose it is, I’ve seen very little of it. I feel it though.

“I’m not happy here, Brookes,” he continued presently. “The life of America, after Europe, unsettles me. It disturbs and distorts every view I have. Maybe I shouldn’t be so sensitive to externals—but they batter me to pieces. I should have been a cloistered monk illuminating missals.”

"Don't think you'd make a very good monk."  
Brookes smiled easily, and Ives smiled back.

"Maybe not.

"Seriously, Brookes, I'm rather a changed person for these two years—"

"I know."

"You said once that life hadn't begun on me. Remember? It was rather an amazing prophecy. What's it going to do to me, d'ye think?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing. What's it done to you already?"

"You mean—?"

"Everything. You've a problem on hand. If you were an ordinary man, it possibly wouldn't be a problem. Some men take on a—a problem like yours and it doesn't do a thing to them. But this kind of thing strikes deep in a nature—in an organization such as yours. Remember old Lenoir?"

"Yes. Isn't it strange? I've thought of him a number of times this winter."

"Well, he's an illustration of what I mean. Lenoir is a *compartmented* personality. See what I mean?"

Ives nodded.

"You aren't. You're all one piece. What affects one remote part of you affects everything. I don't think that's a question of strength or weakness, of merit or

demerit of any kind—it's simply a matter of organization."

"Do you think I'm going to have a—a bust-up of some kind, Brookes? I'm in for this seriously. It's a complicated—or, perhaps I should say, a contradictory situation. I'm—oh, well, I think you understand it—Leslie is terrifically important to me, and—"

"Say what you want to."

"Well, you said I was all of a piece. There's something beyond that. I'm all of a piece with Astrid, too, but I didn't know it. Couldn't have made any difference if I had. It just happened. But I think it had to happen. I was in for it."

"You've an explanatory sound about you, Robert—almost apologetic. That isn't necessary. I seldom blame any one for anything they do or think. We're the sum of an awful lot of forces and influences we didn't know anything about. I'm pretty near a fatalist about conduct. Ever read the Behaviorists?"

"Yes; a little."

"You know what I mean, then, if I get 'em right. All the same I think—it seems to me that we're like a total at the foot of a column of figures. Innumerable ancestors have been putting down figures. Circumstances of one kind and another have been putting

down figures in other columns. All at once destiny adds up the columns and the result is you."

"But—"

"I know. I know everything you're going to say. There are all sorts of philosophical objections to that—common sense objections, too, which are a lot more valid. I'm only using it as a convenient figure of speech, but there's something in it at that."

The talk ran on, touching on a wide range of topics, some intimate and personal, others apparently unrelated. On the surface it was very much the normal talk of two intimate friends who could safely make long-distance allusions, take short cuts to a meaning, or play comfortably with ellipses.

Each one knew, however, that it was a conversation of overtones. Beneath all of the casual references to people, philosophy, psychology, and unimportant events lay the web of a logical exchange of opinion and feeling on matters of grave importance to both of them.

Brookes made no further reference to Astrid, and asked no questions about her, nor did he allude remotely to Ives' feeling about her, or to any thought he might have about their future. He knew that Ives could not have at this moment an ordered plan in his mind, or any very clear view of either present conditions or future possibilities.

Brookes Parker's mind rested securely on a broad base of practical common sense. The rise of his imaginative and emotional life was foundationed. He had a complete faith in this foundation and would have been amazed to discover how slight a counterpart of this existed in the make-up of his friend. Ives was like a cloud. His discerning French grandmother had described him when he was a boy, as being all top and no bottom.

Astrid knew this, and Leslie had just discovered it. He was of the very nature of flight. Stationed, or secured, the essence of his genius and his peculiar charm, as well, could not exist.

Leslie had had a sudden bewildering revelation. She knew then that only in freedom could he be held. However unsatisfactory that might be to a woman, she felt that she must accept it. He could not belong to any one.

It was this that Brookes, lacking feminine intuition, did not know. What each so happily believed to be complete understanding was mostly affection and sympathy.

The interpenetration of individual worlds is so slight, and the habit of each in supposing his world to be similar to that of another is so general.

The tragedy of isolation: complete, irremediable, unbelievable.

Vain words carrying their unreliable signals from one to another. Only love, or sympathy, like sunlight, illumines the distant fate of another, allies it to the common human destiny, gives it its meager dole of understanding.

Deeds: so important to the moment, so charged with pain and ecstasy; so soon covered with dust—meaningless and forgotten.



## *Part IV*

### I

Brookes made his perilous way through the heedless Paris traffic to Astrid's hotel.

He was shocked at her appearance. She looked years older. The courageous lift that he had always felt in her was gone.

"My dear Brookes!"

He held her hand without speaking.

She turned her head away after a moment. "Yes, I know. You do not like what you see. Sit down."

The conversation moved slowly through the preliminaries of commonplace. Each seemed reluctant to abandon safe ground.

Finally Brookes replaced his tea cup on the table.

"The tour, Astrid: is it as bad as your letter said?"

"Quite. The remaining concerts have been canceled. It seemed best. Hansen agreed—on the grounds of ill health. It was a nightmare. Never have I dreamed that I could undergo anything so terrible."

"What was the matter, really, Astrid? Just—?"

"Yes. I was more shaken than I thought. It is absurd that I could not meet the first serious crisis of



my life more—more heroically. It was—well, something vital had been subtracted from me. I was only a part of myself. Something important—necessary—to my playing was no longer with me.”

“You didn’t have time to get hold of yourself.”

“I suppose that was it.”

“You shouldn’t have been alone—”

“That was nothing. I am used to being much alone. Often I am better so—alone. It was not that. My desolation is inside, Brookes. None of the things outside have anything to do with me. I have often been long away from Robert. It may seem strange to you, but I could stay away, always, very long, when I knew that he was absorbed in his work. At such times, you know, he is not here, quite, in this world. But now I seem suddenly to wish to be there. And—he does not want me.”

Brookes fell back on conventional formulæ.

“—when you go back to New York and begin playing—”

“I shall not play in America, Brookes.”

“Not going to play? Why—I thought it was all arranged! Why not?”

“Hansen will not risk it. My notices have been bad. They are in the hands of every American manager. Besides, I do not wish to play—now, not just now.”

"Then you will go back at once?"

"I am not returning to America."

He stared blankly at her.

"*Not re—*" He had not been prepared for this. He knew now that he had had a sudden hope that she would stay on while Ives was in Spain. But of course — The bottom dropped out of his kindly, ordered world.

"Oh, Astrid—I had hoped you would."

"For what? America is not home, you know. I was there because of Robert. Of course, I am fond of my friends. You and Ellen have been heavenly good to me. But you are often in Europe. We shall see each other as in the past—"

That was just it. It was the fragmentary past that he did not wish to have repeated. It was the past that seemed so empty and unsatisfactory in comparison with a possible future.

"I wish—" He hesitated.

"What, Brookes?"

"I wish you'd come over and stay with us. Ellen would be delighted—more than happy. You have no better friends than we wish to be. And I—I would not trouble you. Of course I see that there is nothing much in America for you, but—"

Again he hesitated.

"I think you are about to say there is not much anywhere for me. That is true. But in spite of long years away, Norway is home. Oslo—you know I have always gone back frequently. I must go there. I think of it with something that promises maybe already the little beginnings of peace."

"You mean you're leaving Robert?"

"It rather seems that I am left—left out of his plans at any rate. It is impossible that I go to Spain when I know that she is going."

"But he planned Spain because of your tour."

"Yes, I know," she replied a little wearily. "But he wishes to go, and he wishes her to come there with him, and he must do it that way."

"Astrid, what are you going to do with Robert?"

"That is hardly the question. Even if it were, I should not know just what to answer you. I am not just an angry or insulted wife. I could so easily forget all of this. There wouldn't be so much as a question of forgiving him anything. I find that a little silly. It is some terribly important spring of pride or self-respect—or maybe just egotism, Brookes—that has been destroyed. I am simply not myself—you see me. I am changed in some fundamental way. I must have time to get acquainted with a new life, a new world and a new self. It may take long. That does not matter."

"And your playing?"

"I shall always play, of course. I could not do otherwise. I shall play very well—most well, I think. But I think I shall never play publicly again. I may mistake myself there. One who is an artist, perhaps must. But not now."

Neither spoke for a while. The early dusk was obscuring her face a little. She appeared for the moment more herself. He could not see the lines of fatigue that were so strange, nor the subtle inertia replacing her usual buoyant energy. All the way over on the boat he had been boyishly eager to see her. He thought of her then more as the friend of old. Now in the intimacy of this room she was again poignantly the woman he loved. Outside the shrill Paris taxis sounded continuously like demons of derision.

There seemed nothing more to say. He felt as if there could never be anything more in the world to talk about. Yet he could not go. He could not believe the thing that was happening. It was an end. That—everything in him arose in storm—he could not accept.

He laid an iron hand on himself. Careful, careful. Steady.

He knew that Astrid had no inkling of what he was feeling. He could spoil everything by one word. It could never be spoken, he knew.

Slowly, as he sat and listened to the strident clamor from the street, a sort of twilight came over him. It was an inner counterpart of the shadow in the room. It blurred and softened.

When he spoke his voice sounded strangely quiet and far away to his ears.

"I think it is a phase—all of this—of our lives and our love and friendship. It is terrible enough, but it will pass, and somehow things will be much the same again. There is nothing irreparable in it."

"You are mistaken. Perhaps you speak so because in the goodness of your heart you wish it so. Nothing is ever again the same after change. This change has not been so sudden, or so violent, as we think, or as it appears. It must have begun long years ago. Maybe it began before we were born . . ."

He was startled. She was echoing his talk with Ives.

". . . I had not perhaps put my feelings into words, or even into thoughts, but I know that my life with Robert is at an end. It may be that he will need me in some way. It may be that I shall have to go back to him. I am not even thinking of how that may be, or if I could. It might be that I must, some day. But I shall always love the man who was Robert Ives—my husband. Whatever he may be, or whatever he may become, he can do nothing to that love. That is my

own—my unique possession—to the end of my life. It is possible that I may be able by and by to think of him as some other than Robert Ives. In any case, the thing that is my love—my heart—is beyond his reach.”

She seemed to forget what those words might mean to him, as she seemed to have forgotten the conversation on the *Leviathan*. He was glad that she could speak freely, glad that she could present herself frankly. There had never been anything of indirection in her.

He arose. “Ellen is going to be terribly sorry you’re not coming back. We had somehow gotten used to the idea of your being in New York, and at Ranley. I suppose this is good-bye for a while. I may be over again in March. If I do, I’ll see you—if I may.”

“I shall hope to see you. Give my warmest love to Ellen—and thanks for everything.”

“There isn’t anything I can say, Astrid. I don’t even know what to wish for you—maybe I wish that life may arrange itself as you wish it, whatever that may be.”

“It is unlikely to do that: but thanks.” Her voice was muffled. The room was almost dark. “Can you find your coat? Shall I—”

“No: no lights, please. My things are here. Good-bye.”

He held her hands in a crushing grasp. She leaned forward and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Thank you for coming. I had to see you. The way you have been good to me! So—*auf Wiedersehen.*"

## II

He was in the lift. He was downstairs. He was outside in the raw, wintry air. He was fumbling with his gloves. Why couldn't he get them on? He had never known his hands to shake like this.

## III

In spite of Brookes' tempered account of his interview with Astrid, Ives realized the extent of the disaster. He was dazed. His cables and letters to her received brief answers that read quite like communications from the Astrid of old; but her decision to remain in Europe, logical as he knew it to be, was the first serious indication he had of the disintegration of his world. There was something about Brookes now that he could not understand. Brookes would not talk about Astrid. Neither would Ellen. Ellen received him with her usual vivacious chatter which avoided, with a sort of bright determination, all reference to dangerous subjects. Brookes, too, had acquired an astonishing skill at veering off from personal and intimate con-

versational openings. It carried with it an implication of something even deeper than disapproval. Ives felt his familiar world fading from him. He was rebuffed and turned back on himself as he had never been before.

He could not seize the differences. They were intangible. He was amazed, puzzled, and saddened beyond words.

Then came a letter from Astrid.

MY DEAR ROBERT: I do not know what it is I wish to say now that I sit here to write to you. I want to be kind, I want to be just, and I want to be truthful. More than ever before in my life I wish that I had a great gift of language that I might convey to you my whole state of mind. I want you to understand me fully so that you will not feel bitter against me, and so that you will know that I do not wish to hurt you. God knows I do not wish to hurt any one. I have no blame for any one and no wish to give any one the slightest discomfort.

I think my realest wish at this moment is to slip quietly out of sight and attract no attention from any one. I do not wish to see any one, or say anything to any one, and I do not wish to be seen or heard.—But I did not begin this letter to write of myself.

Let me say first of all that I love you. I feel that my saying so will not be unwelcome, because I do not believe that



you have anything but kindness in your heart for me. It is simply that I am not for the time—or perhaps not any more—necessary to you. I do not resent this. Only I wonder sometimes where I failed you. I suppose I should never have left you so much. You became used to doing without me, and by and by some one else filled an important place in your heart. Perhaps I could not have held it. Anyway, it is useless to speak of that now. Do you remember Brookes' phrase that he used so often for the things past and done? *Yesterday's business*. Something finished and beyond recall. He always made "yesterday's business" sound fatally finished. So—all of these things that might have been done differently are yesterday's business. There is nothing we can do about them. There is all the more reason why we must make no mistakes today.

You must be free to follow your destiny, and I must somehow work out mine. I am a little bewildered, and don't know how or where to begin. I suppose that will come to me sometime.

. . . I meant to write wisely and philosophically, but I find that I can't. Perhaps it isn't necessary for me to write much. After all I believe that we understand each other better than either of us would have guessed. There is nothing more to say just now—I am going to remain in Oslo. You can reach me here at any time, but do not come. I am not saying good-by. I should not attempt so to place a seal on the future. I am saying no irrevocable words—I am doing

nothing more than just speaking to you as I have always done.

We may not meet again. I have no feeling about how this may be. I only know that I love you and wish above all things that you may have what you wish to make you happy, and that I cannot see you—now.

I am doing the only possible thing. Do not worry about the failure of the tour. It does not seem at this moment to be a matter of any importance.

I shall hear accounts of the exhibition. I hope all goes well. Best luck, Robert—

ASTRID.

Ives knew Astrid too well to hope for any immediate change in her. If she was bewildered, he was a hundred times more so. Unheard-of things were happening to him. At the same time he knew that this step of Astrid's was inevitable. It was the only thing she could do. He could be clear enough and honest enough to admit that. He had to be free, but he only half wished to be.

For the first time since boyhood he broke down. Leslie found herself in the somewhat unique position of comforting her lover for the loss of another woman. Only a sense of humor that came ruefully to the rescue lent anything of graciousness to her enactment of the rôle.

## IV

"It's about the oddest-looking attachment I've ever seen," Brookes declared after a long discussion with Ellen during which she read in his careful omissions much of the truth about the meeting with Astrid in Paris. "They are so grave, so unsmiling. Both of them look like the day after a funeral. You know if some one got any fun out of it, we could feel better about it all; but every one—all three of them—are miserable."

"Of course." Ellen assented with a kind of rancorous vigor. "It couldn't be any other way. It's astonishing how selfish, and how blind, a man can be. Robert Ives is attempting the ancient impossibility of eating his cake and having it, too."

"Well," Brookes' tone of voice was gloomy, "he seems to come about as near to doing it as any one can, but, as I say, it doesn't seem to be much fun."

"He won't have any cake left at all. In the words of the moment, it won't be long now."

"What do you mean?"

"Brookes, do you think Leslie will stick?"

"Why shouldn't she?"

"I don't believe she will."

"She's in love with him. He's in love with her in some sort of way—"

"You've said it. *Some sort of way*. No woman in the world, young or old, accepts 'some sort of way.' "

"—and she has him all to herself."

"Oh, has she? You're as blind as he is. She hasn't him all to herself and she knows it. Astrid exerts a greater influence—is more actually present with him than ever before. Leslie isn't stupid. She senses that—knows it. And she has the pride and intolerance of youth. And then there's Marcia."

"For Heaven's sake, Ellen! I wish you wouldn't be so mysterious and—and—come out and say what you mean. *What* about Marcia? You say 'and there is Marcia'—*where* is she?"

"I fancy Leslie would like an answer to that, too."

Brookes made an angry gesture.

"Brookes, dear," Ellen continued softly, "it's something like this. I've been observing rather closely this fall. Robert is, as you said once, a many-sided person. That kind of person requires a good many complementary friendships and affections. Robert needs you, for example, and I hope nothing will ever spoil that friendship. He probably needed Astrid less specifically, and more generally, than any one, but he didn't know it—doesn't know it yet—"

"That's a bit involved. You're letting your crazy fancy run again."

"Just wait a minute! The need of Leslie, I have no doubt, is just as deep and genuine, but it's much simpler. Marcia in a way that is peculiar to her—yes, I mean to be a little catty—does give wings to his imagination. All of you think Marcia is something strange and mysterious."

"Well now, honestly, don't *you* think she's rather inexplicable?"

"Yes; but not in the way you mean. I told you once that Marcia is a devourer of experience. If she has to devour a few individuals along with it, she doesn't mind. You see Marcia married the wrong man. Deering is interesting, but he is one of those disconcerting people who see things as they are. Remember Herodias in Wilde's *Salome*? Every one goes off his head a little about the moon. Each person reveals himself through his rhapsodic response to the moon. Old Herodias remarks simply, 'The moon is the moon.' That's Deering. All of Marcia's moons cease being silver roses and become dead satellites the moment he speaks. He reduces her to prose and is amused when she tries to make poetry out of it. And she *has* to have poetry. But she's afraid of Deering."

"You leave her just as mysterious to me as she was in the beginning."

Ellen looked at him for a moment. "Yes; I suppose

so," she spoke slowly. "But she isn't mysterious to another woman. It's simply this: Marcia Deering is going to have the thrill out of life that she thinks is due her. She doesn't mind who pays for the thrill. And the thing that thrills her is power over the imagination of others. She sees herself as an intellectual excitant. You know—there is probably nothing else in the world so enraging to other women. And, to put it rather bluntly, she promises a lot and pays nothing. She—don't be cross, Brookes: you think I'm just clawing another woman who is more brilliant and interesting than I am—she doesn't really give imaginative stimulation or anything else. She merely makes herself enigmatic and mysterious by leaving ordinary things half said, and the wonder and mystery that is in men themselves responds."

"But what has that to do—?"

"With Leslie? A lot, Brookes, a lot. Leslie is nobody's fool. She's evidently worked things out so far as Astrid is concerned, but she can never work things out where Marcia is concerned."

"But I don't see that she has anything to work out there. Ives hasn't—"

"Yes, he has. They've been together rather often, and he hangs on her words—gets that *illuminated* look that—well, it makes even me a little mad, and I don't

care. But it must give Leslie some wakeful nights. If she would just hurry him off to Spain, it would be better for her. But that kind of woman rankles anyhow, no matter how far away one gets from her. I always hate what she does to you. You get lit up in the same way and dash down to the Bank and make a million dollars!"

Brookes laughed. "I wish some one *could* do that, Ellen. Unfortunately—"

"Don't be literal. I don't care if she makes Ives paint the finest pictures in the world, there is still something false about the way she does it. And there is something so genuine about Astrid and Leslie."

"Of all the inconsistent—"

"It's this, silly. She does everything in tribute to herself. She feeds her vanity. She doesn't really care about the person she's doing things to, and she doesn't care about the result. Do you see what I mean?"

"I hear what you say."

She spread her hands in a gesture of helplessness. "Go to bed. You're hopeless—maybe. I half believe you understand me perfectly—and agree with me."

He laughed again, and kissed her good-night.

"Poor old Robert." He spoke half to himself.

"You're right. When it's all over—and, inevitably, it'll be all over some day—Robert is going to be alone;

and he's going to be the most alone person in the world. He'll never form again the powerful attachments that will give him what these can give."

"You draw a dismal picture."

"It will be dismal. Natures like his have in them the germs of their own destruction. When a personality can attract so strongly there are always clashes among the forces attracted. His friends can't be friends with each other; so there he is, a perpetual storm center. I like Robert—I love him, really, rather as one loves a wholly alien creature. I think people must have loved Shelley that way, and Chopin. He is so unsuspecting: I am sure he never meant to set off fireworks. There are things that possess him, just as the genius of painting possesses him. I no more blame him for his peculiar personal relations than I blame him for painting."

"He should have been married to some one like you."

"No; if I, even with my point of view, were in love with him, I'd change and become all woman just as the others do. Leslie Pell probably has an intelligence that functions capably in most matters, but where he is concerned she is just a great mass of emotions. I'd hate to be in love with Robert; but sometimes I think I'd like to take care of him."

"You, too!"



"Don't be absurd."

"I'm not. I'm just wondering what it is that some men have that can attract and hold the really wonderful women."

Brookes looked a little wistful.

"Don't be envious. He can't be happy, or make any one else happy."

"I'm not envious. I was just wondering."

## V

Ives was able to conclude his affairs in America much more quickly than he had expected. Exhibitions and successes were old stories with him. He arranged passage for the middle of January. The house was sub-let, and the studio closed. He had moved to a hotel for the few days remaining.

## VI

The actual preparations for the journey abroad brought to Leslie a keener realization of the sundering of ties and relationships.

Her passport and tickets lay on the desk. She looked at them with a species of amazement.

The early winter twilight closed about her. The moving lights from the street cast their flickering changes on the ceiling and peopled the familiar room with

ghosts. Very soon some one else would be in these rooms. These same sounds would come up from the street and she would be far away in a strange country. What would it be like?

One more day and Robert would be gone. Then a week and she would follow. Her familiar world went into fragments and swirled kaleidoscopically about her.

Leonie summoned her to dinner. Ives was coming later. Tomorrow she would not see him. Tomorrow she would be really alone. She had cut herself free at last from every one. Curious how kindly her feeling was at this moment for all of them—her father and Mabry. She had no resentments left.

A strange stricken mood came upon her at the thought of Astrid, even though Astrid had almost become once more the shadowy figure she had been before her arrival in America last May. Only last May! A few months—but that time seemed infinitely long ago.

Leslie would have been amazed could she have heard Ellen Parker's theory about her own attitude to Marcia Deering. Mrs. Deering had disturbed her at first, but she understood everything much better now—better, even, than she had a week ago. She had had nothing to do these past days but think. Many things were clearer than they had been. She knew that Robert would be

attracted by many people in the years to come. She must be prepared for that. But he loved her. He had given ample enough proof of that. He might not always love her. She must be prepared for that, too. Astrid's fate might well be a prophecy of her own. But there was nothing she could do about such a likelihood.

She must learn the immemorial lessons of women. Leonie was always muttering wise proverbs. *Half a loaf*—yes; she could learn that lesson, too. But to wait—to wait for the things that might happen, to wonder, and doubt, and fear: to love and give all against the age-old masculine uncertainty—all of that might not be so easy. Her courage strengthened her love as her love gave her courage—these and her youth might yet be invincible.

## VII

She ate her dinner abstractedly. What was Leonie thinking? She almost peered into the old French-woman's inscrutable countenance. Leonie knew so much—so much of the ways of men. Her philosophy and her shrewdness were almost preternatural.

She had had to tell Leonie. Her father had probably told her much more. Whatever Leonie thought did not show in her face, and no word had crossed her lips. She probably shared the tolerance of her nation toward

affairs of the heart. Anyway, it was enormously comforting to know that they were not to be separated.

. . . The bell sounded his familiar signal of three short rings.

Leonie served coffee in the tiny drawing room and withdrew like a shadow, closing the door with sedulous care behind her.

### VIII

He had gone. She would not see him again until he met her in Paris. It was agreed that he would wait for her there instead of going on to Spain.

It was late but she curled herself into a deep chair and yielded to the waves of thought that bore her far and far.

Robert had been so dear. His words still lay against her ear like the caress of music. She was so sure of his love—as sure as she was of her own. It was a strange thing that drew two people together and held them so strongly. She arose and touched the keys of the piano. Like that—maybe. That C and E—something deep in the nature of sound made them go together, belong to each other, just as C and B did not. There was unrest in that. She recalled a little of her rudimentary musical education. C and B struggled in their very natures against each other; they tended elsewhere. Perhaps there was something similar in the natures of people.

Something in her arose and answered to the deeps of his nature. She was at one, perfectly in accord, with him. If they could only hold it so.

She sat down again and pressed her face against the brocade covering. These last hours had been perfect—perfect. If she never had anything else in the world, she could live on these. Life, she knew, could not always be made up of such hours. She must remember these—hold fast to them. She dreaded tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. Perhaps there would never again be hours so flawless. She would have to think of Astrid—and Marcia Deering, and other women like Marcia Deering, who would come into his life and interest him, carry him far from her for a time. Of course, he would come back, but she would need this memory.

## IX

Ecstasy and wonder paused a little like the first moment of turning tide. She felt the reaction from the evening's excitement. She was tired. The faint tinkle of a tiny clock in its half open morocco case told the hour. Three o'clock. The street clamors were gone. She missed them. They had enveloped her with the reassurance of a world full of people—people who went about living with no concern for her, no knowledge even of her existence. The very commonplace of many

people going to dine, going to the theater, going—going always, had in it the substantial testimony of a world that was prosaically actual. Nights could be so terrifying. She had not been sleeping well for a long time, and these hours, empty of everything save unnamed and unclassifiable fears, were becoming familiar.

Three o'clock. Leonie had said once that human vitality was at its lowest in the early hours of the morning—the body's resistance at its weakest. A superstition probably. Still, she remembered reading once that most people die just before dawn.

. . . The tide of her exultation set strongly outward. She was really terribly tired—too tired to undress and go to bed. The high throb of her courage changed subtly to a beat of foreboding.

She closed her eyes and held her face hard against the chair. The stiff brocade bit into her delicate skin and left an imprint of the design.

Robert . . . Robert . . . Robert! Why had she waited to go on a later boat? If only she had decided to go with him!

They pressed close around her now, these shadowy fears rising from obscure depths of her mind. Maybe Leonie was right. One's resistance was low after the day's long strain. But perhaps these threatening shapes

held at bay by sheer physical vitality and the cheerful obstinacy of the will were real—or, at least, shadows of reality. Perhaps one deceived one's self. Day and daytime thoughts might well be the illusion and these grisly specters the stark reality.

Questions so successfully answered and routed in the day, drummed furiously upon her brain.

Love . . . love—this thrill of nerves and excitement of imagination—could she trust all the future to that gossamer fragility? She had known perfections: could she content herself with less? Could she fill hours and days, weeks and months and years with the dream stuff—the mere vapor of occasional hours of happiness? Could she set the wavering strength of her own personality against the mighty pervasion of those years Robert had spent with Astrid? And that vast world of his artist imagination—that mysterious realm whose call drowned every other voice: what was she beside that? He would dream dreams in which she had no part. He would meet and like people whose very language was unknown to her. There were importances, fleeting as the changes of a tree in the wind, that meant nothing to her. By the time she learned them he would have gone far beyond—be concerned with stranger subtleties.

. . . *Her heart was now a fleeing terror.*

## x

What could she do? She must speak to some one. She must have some word out of this black night—some little thread to hold to. She thought of telephoning Robert. She could hear his sleepy, amused voice. She couldn't bear that. Leonie? Leonie would put her to bed with a hot water bottle. Leonie believed in the power of hot water bottles to exorcise all evils of mind and body.

The room was quite cold. She arose and flung a fur coat about her shoulders.

A thousand minute evidences of the past weeks thronged together. His abstraction, his deep and shaken concern for Astrid, his expansion in the presence of Marcia, Mabry's warnings, Leonie's silence, her father's advice—those and the misgivings of her heart kept up an infernal accompaniment.

She tried to rally her recollections of the hours just past. They mocked her.

Panic spread like a wild fire along her shaking nerves. She began to walk up and down the room. Little whimpers escaped her. She shut her teeth savagely on her lips. The last of her strength ebbed. All confidence went with it . . . She would never be able to hold him . . . she was only going abroad to crucify her-



self . . . he would be ashamed of her if he could see her now . . . she was ashamed of herself . . . better hide herself and the knowledge of her inadequacy far away. Only in that way could she save the smallest remnant of her pride—only in that way could she save anything of his love for her. If she ran away, he would remember and love a dream of her. If he could see her as she was, he would be lost to her.

. . . Others *would* take him from her! He was after all most deeply a stranger. She did not know him, or understand him. She had seen him, a bright, unseizable phantom . . . the essential personality of the man eluded her. It would kill her never to reach him . . .

What to do? What to do? She stopped suddenly and stood quite still. A wave of deadly cold swept slowly over her. It paralyzed every emotion in her.

She looked around the room—unseeing. The dawn had come, a faint, watery blue. A returning life clattered and echoed through the street.

She was calm now—the desperate calm of a frozen hysteria at its apogee. She seated herself at the desk and wrote without hesitation.

ROBERT, DEAREST: I cannot go with you. I have thought it out—it has taken all night to do it, but my mind is made

up. I love you—I love you too much. That is why I cannot go. It has been perfect—sometimes. Those times I must hold against destruction. I know that I can't make you happy, and—Robert, darling, I don't mean to hurt you—I know you can't make me happy either.

This is best. Good-by. Forget me. I know that you can. I shall never forget you. I shall always love you.

Please don't try to reach me today—you can't.

It isn't your fault, Robert, nothing is your fault—only, I know I can't go with you. Good-by—remember always that I love you.

LESLIE.

She placed a special delivery stamp on the envelope and dropped it in the mail chute. Then she penciled a hasty note and thrust it under Leonie's door.

She changed her dress and in a few minutes was walking down Park Avenue. The morning was biting cold and she shivered violently. She felt weak.

## XI

Leslie never knew exactly how that day passed. She stopped at the Grand Central station and drank a cup of coffee. Then she walked east and south through streets already teeming with strange people who looked more like bundles of rags than human beings. She saw without registering clearly what she saw, but for years

she remembered one window in which was displayed a sheep's-head, raw and red, with the glazed eyes still in the sockets. Other ghastly objects—organs of some sort, she conjectured—hung from hooks. She hurried on. Cold and hunger finally reached her brain through a stupefying haze. People stared at her, and sometimes spoke, but she did not pause.

She stopped again at a dingy little restaurant and ordered tea. She drank the tea but sat so long crumbling the toast that the suspicious attendant asked for payment.

Out again, she went ceaselessly back and forth, back and forth through the maze of ill-smelling streets, jostled and crowded until she was faint with fatigue.

In the late afternoon she came into an open space that seemed familiar. She blinked, half-seeing, at the surrounding square. Recognition came with a dizzying stab of pain. *Gramercy Park!* Her betraying feet had brought her here!

She leaned against the iron fence and looked up at the blank studio window . . . Her numb fingers searched frantically in her bag. Yes, she still had the key. She would go up . . . maybe the sight of it would kill her. She hoped so.

The waddling janitress answered her ring.

"The studio? Yes, ma'am, but I think everything's gone now. The door's locked."

"I have a key. I'll leave it with you when I come down."

She entered the tiny electric elevator and pushed the button. The stuffy box crawled slowly upward and stopped with a decrepit clank.

The air of the gaunt room touched her face with clammy cold. She stood for a little while in the doorway.

Gradually the familiar aspects of the place emerged from the strange bareness. It was like recognizing beloved features in the disfigurement of a corpse. She found herself walking around in little circles. Something was tearing at her breast. She made incoherent choking sounds.

The stupor of the day fell away from her. The preceding night and its events were revealed in one blinding flash. . . .

What had she done? *Live without Robert?* She must have been insane . . . she had decided . . . she couldn't be happy with him. God in Heaven, did that matter? What was unhappiness beside the unspeakable agony of this moment? But she had written? What had

she written? Oh, yes! She remembered. Of course he wouldn't want her to come now; but she must speak to him once more. But maybe . . . if he did want her, she could go now—at once. Her passport . . . Passage could always be had at the last moment. A very frenzy of haste took possession of her.

The telephone—where was it? There, on the floor. She tried to call . . . of course, disconnected. She must hurry . . . she must reach him before he sailed to say just one more word. What time was it? Her watch had stopped. Quick, why couldn't she hurry? Her knees trembled with weakness. She half sank to the floor.

A step sounded outside. She stumbled to her feet. The janitress must not see her like this. She must be ready to say something. What should she say?

The door opened and the half articulate words died in her throat.

*. . . How white he was! Was he speaking? What was he saying? . . . No matter what the words might be—she understood . . . Yes, of course she would go. She had feared that she could not hold him, that she would not be happy . . . It made no difference—she would follow him whether he wanted her or not . . . whether he kept her for a year or a day. It was her destiny.*



17

